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["AND SO, GILBERT, MY BOY, IT'S YOUR FAULT—I'M SURPRISED AT THAT!"]

TWO MARRIAGES.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHRISTMAS was passed at the Manor. It was a very festive season for the poor, for the smaller tenants, in short, for the parish in general—"a splendid Christmas," as their stockings testified, to Jack and Alick, and there was high holiday in the servants' hall, but it was a sad and dull enough anniversary for the master of the house when he sat alone over the fire, after the boys had gone to bed, and when the servants were carousing downstairs. However, "hope springs eternal in the human breast."

Another week, another day might bring her! Such a thing as baffling the very best "private inquiry office" in England could not be done by any ordinary young woman—surely not! But that was just the thing that Georgie was not. She had gone through so much of recent years that she was always expecting the unexpected; always prepared for anything, for what had always latterly come to her—the worst.

She was sharp, quick, decided in all her movements now. She was hardened, though not in the way that Gilbert had accused her of being hardened; and, moreover, she was a rich woman, and had four thousand a year at her back; knew how to bribe, was bitterly unforgiving to Gilbert for the wrong he had done her, and did not choose to be found out!

And so time went on. January passed, and the only remarkable event to signalise it at the Manor was that the drawing-room, boudoir, and Mrs. Vernon's own apartments were done up with lavish magnificence—money no object—done up in her favourite colours, her taste remembered and studied down to the smallest detail. A new landau was ordered, a pony carriage, a pair of Russian ponies; Mrs. Vernon's own hack was kept in constant exercise, ready to be used the moment its mistress returned.

But days went by—aye, and weeks—and she did not appear! The drawing-rooms were never occupied, the landau was never taken out, the ponies and hack were still standing there eating their heads off. The place and establishment were, however, still kept up—

kept up at the utmost pitch of perfection, as if at any hour of the day the absent mistress of the house might be expected to return, but still she never came—never was heard of, and now, not merely days and weeks, but months, had gone by, and still "she cometh not" might have been the burden of Gilbert Vernon's song.

It had gradually leaked out that she had gone away under a kind of cloud more than two years previously, that this cloud had been subsequently entirely cleared away, and that the sun of complete innocence had shone out since, but that, somehow, Mrs. Vernon's pride would not suffer her to return; "no, not even for the children's sake," said one gossiping matron to another, nodding her head and lifting her hands and eyebrows.

"I wonder what will be the end of it?" said all the neighbours. "I wonder what was the real reason of the row between the Vernons, whom everyone thought such a happy couple?—quite models to the whole county! But one never sees what is behind the scenes, of course."

"I always thought Mr. Vernon was too

polite to his wife," said one lady, with cool decision.

"Depend upon it, a man who carries his wife's shawls and parasols, and hands her out of a carriage, and opens the door for her, and all that sort of thing, just as if she were not married to him at all, puts it on to disarm suspicion. I always understood Gilbert Vernon had a hatred to matrimony. This young woman caught him; and, believe me, he beat her behind the scenes, and she ran away, and won't come back."

"I don't think Mrs. Vernon ever gave me the look of an ill-used wife," said another lady, "much less ever showed the marks of blows and bruises. I like Gilbert Vernon; he is a gentleman to his finger ends. Believe me that it is she who has chosen him the clever foot. I never have any faith in these unequal marriages; they come to grief—the people, I mean—sooner or later."

"But if she is in fault," said number three, "why should he be so anxious to have her back? Why has the house been all newly done up—new carriages, new horses, new liveries? That does not look as if your theory would hold water, Mrs. Sharp," turning to the last speaker.

"Oh, my dear, you are not so well up in the ways of the world as I am," said the other, with a smile. "Don't you know that she has come in for a large fortune?" spreading out both hands with gusto as she spoke. "It's that, and he is quite ready to take her back and wink at all her little errors; and then, you see, the children, as they are boys, it's no matter so much what their mother has been or has done. If they were girls it would be quite another thing. You can see that!"

This last lady spoke with such an air of confidence and supreme conviction that she silenced any other arguments—hers were considered to be amply conclusive. Mrs. Vernon had been under a cloud, and was to be forgiven and reinstated on account of her fortune.

These ladies all had made very bad shots, as we know; but Mr. Vernon and the queer sort of affairs up at the Manor had been a perfect windfall to them in the way of gossip all through a very wet winter and a cold, bleak spring.

These were the little nobodies who lived in white villas on the borders of Marston, and were, in one respect, like Madame's cotillon—between earth and heaven—being half way between the townfolk on one hand, upon whom they looked down with great scorn, and "the counts" on the other, whom they looked up to and worshipped at a respectful distance.

As months went on Gilbert became more hopeless. He now regretted that he had been in such a hurry to return and set up house at the Manor, and had so foolishly jumped at the conclusion that Georgie would be easily discovered and would gladly return.

"What a fool," he said to himself, "he had been and must look in the eyes of his friends, having made such preparations, and being so full of expectation for a person who had never come, and probably never meant to come."

He had given up seeking her at last as a bad job; he had spent hundreds of pounds in vain; searches had been in quest, through his agents, of at least half-a-dozen ladies, who had turned to be complete strangers.

There was no use in carrying on such a fruitless search. If she chose to come home she knew where it was, and of her whereabouts he was as ignorant as ever.

One person in the household knew the absent lady's address, and that was the boys' nurse, Mrs. Lumsden; but she was under a most solemn promise never to reveal it save by her mistress's express permission. She had corresponded with her constantly, posting the letters always with her own hands, under cover to Mrs. Vernon's bankers.

She kept her posted up in all news about the boys at regular intervals. She even ventured to add little extra items about the

master—that he had everything prepared for her, and great search made for her, and was always talking to the boys about her moon coming back.

At one time Mrs. Lumsden threw this out as a broad hint, but it had no effect. Then she ventured to add that "Mr. Vernon was in very low spirits, and seemed greatly disheartened and lonely."

Mrs. Lumsden had known of the break-up, and of the whole story from first to last, about Mrs. Vernon's first marriage. Her sympathies had been entirely with her mistress.

She was devoted to her and the boys, especially Master Alick, whom she had what is called "taken from the month," and whom she looked upon as her own special property.

All through that dreadful year in London her heart had been entirely with the so-called Mrs. George, and she had felt—she could not have exactly explained why—rather angry with Mr. Vernon, and had been sharp and short in her answers when he ventured into the nursery at Lady Fanny's.

Now it was the other way. She was angry with her mistress and sorry for him.

It was wretched to see a young man like him living all alone in utter solitude in that great big house, breakfasting alone, dining alone, going out alone.

No, she had no patience with Mrs. Vernon at all. She knew she was waited at home, and that if she came she would be only too welcome. She was obstinate—she had got some queer notions in her head—she had no notion of coming back.

Mrs. Lumsden had written as strongly as she dared, and the answer she had received was, to say the least of it, sharp, short, and decisive. "She was not to write in that tone again, although she was a very worthy, excellent, faithful woman."

Mrs. Lumsden put the letter in the fire, as she did all that came from her mistress, and made up her mind that she would not meddle again; it was ill and thankless work interfering between man and wife, but she was really sorry for her master for all that.

One day as she was passing through the hall standing in the drawing-room with Jack, who was clamouring to be taken for a drive.

After some discussion about his horses, it was settled that he might go, and he instantly rushed madly for his hat, cannoning against the solid Mrs. Lumsden in the doorway, and clattering away across the caken hall.

"He is growing more like her every day!" ventured Mrs. Lumsden, nodding her head at a small oil-painting of Mrs. Vernon that stood between two windows on an easel.

"Yes," assented her listener, glancing at the same picture, wistfully. "I am beginning to think, Mrs. Lumsden—mind you, I would not say this to anyone but you—that that we will never see her again! She may be dead!" in a lower voice.

"Oh! no, sir!" very eagerly, "she's not that!"

"What!" looking at her sharply. "Ah! I see, Mrs. Lumsden! you know—you know where she is! You speak with confidence! Tell me where she is—I implore you!"

"What did I say, sir?" getting red with alarm. "What did I say? Only that she was not dead!"

"It was the way you spoke—the manner, not the matter! I believe she writes to you. Now, Mrs. Lumsden, for Heaven's sake tell me the truth! Your face will speak for you if your tongue won't. Pity me! I know you will!"

"Truth! Good heart alive; what have I ever said?" greatly distressed, and twisting her apron into every shape, looking dreadfully put out and nervous.

"Is she well?" he continued; "surely you may tell me that much—only that much?" very earnestly.

"Oh! Mr. Vernon, you are a gentleman," tearfully, "you would not go for to make a poor woman like me break her bounden word,

now would you? I've given my promise to her—my sacred, solemn promise, and you just took me unawares just now. Oh! sir," beginning to cry in earnest—"Oh! sir, you would not press me, would you?"

"I don't ask you to break your promise, you may rely on that; but you break none, surely, if you tell me is she well—no harm in that, surely?"

"She is well; I may say that."

"I suppose you have been in her confidence all along," rather bitterly, "you have the advantage of me."

"Well, sir," wiping her eyes, "I've been in what you may call her confidence, and write and tell her how the boys is regular—and, maybe, it's your own fault for not knowing as much as I do. There's been such a lot of mistakes about that Blaine, and all, and, poor young lady, her heart was nearly broken because you, it really were!"

"Between us!" indignantly. "Now, Mrs. Lumsden, had I anything to say to that? Come now, be just."

"No, no; and as under you are vexed with her now—I am a bit myself. I can't make it out. And she did seem, if I may say it without offense, made fond of you once, and it seems hard as I should know what you don't, but it's his orders—and then," with a sudden gush of professional pride, "you see as I was Master Alick's nurse to her first—I took him from the month, you'll remember."

"Yes—I remember, too, how he roared night and day; you had no chance. But I suppose she says nothing of me, Mrs. Lumsden, nor of coming home?" glancing at her indignantly.

"Not a word."

"And does she seem happy?"

"Oh! yes, she writes cheerful. And now, really, Mr. Vernon—now you want me no more, will you?" humbly.

"No—no more. I am sorry, now, we all come home," walking to the window and looking out; "but it can't be helped. I'll have them come shut up; there are not likely to be any more," coming back towards Mrs. Lumsden as he spoke.

"Maybe they will before long," she said, coaxingly; "maybe she'll change her mind yet, and walk out of this queer action; maybe—"

"Faster! faster!" heard two small figures, in pilot cloth top-coats, like miniature men; "are you coming? What a time you have been. We've been out in the dog-cart waiting for you—do come!"

And, still dragged on either side by his impatient and impatient sons, he left Mrs. Lumsden the drawing-room to herself.

CHAPTER XL.

To divulge the secret of Georgie's very secure retreat we must go back to the very day, the very hour, when she was left by Maggie, key in hand, to be her own portress to freedom.

She had waited until the house was silent, and was about to creep downstairs when a sudden noise caused her to start back with beating heart—timid as a fawn.

The Blaines were evidently quarrelling, having quite a scene below, something similar to the one she had witnessed the previous evening, only on a more extensive scale; high, shrill talking, rising to screams; low mutters of a man's voice; more screams; then a sudden loud rumbling and rolling of furniture; then dead silence.

She stole like a mouse to the top of the landing, and looked over. In a moment a door downstairs was flung open, and dashed back.

She had a hasty view of Mary Todd, with sweeping robes, gathered in one hand, dishevelled hair, a wild, red face, putting out the lobby gas, and then ascending with strange, uneven steps to her room—the one just below Georgie's.

Georgie waited and waited, sitting on the

top of the stairs, trying to screw up her courage, and listening eagerly for his footstep.

Once he had gone up, she might descend with impunity; but what agony he was in coming! and the precious moments were flying away so fast!

At last, spurred to desperation, she took her bundle in her hand, and, with knees actually knocking together, fearing that any moment he might come forth and seize her, she stole downstairs, down past the smoking-room door, with beating heart and bated breath—down, down, all the way down, in the dark, to the hall.

She opened the door, having put back the bolts with a trembling hand, and she stood outside once more in the open air—free!

She closed the door as softly as she could, and then began to run.

But she did not keep up that pace long. She was soon out of breath.

It was a misty, drizzling night, the streets were wet, and her feet soon soaking.

Every policeman she saw made her heart bound, every skulking figure made her shake like a leaf.

Here she dived down an alley to avoid one; there she crept under an archway to avoid another; now she sat down in a porch, and rested.

It was four o'clock in the grey morning when she arrived at a great big central station, and went in and sat upon one of the wooden seats, completely worn out.

Who would think, to look at it now, that it was such a very bustling, busy place in the daytime?

There was not a soul to be seen. It was bitterly cold. The waiting-rooms, of course, were shut up. The first morning train did not start till half-past seven.

There for three mortal hours she sat, half-frozen, watching the gradual waking up of the station: from the refreshment-room cat, who was the first arrival from a long night's marauding and serenading on neighbouring roofs; to the clerk of the ticket-office, who appeared last upon the scene.

Fires were lit, porters began to bustle, engines in remote sheds to get up steam. The sooner there was a train ready to leave the better for her. Where its destination might be was of no consequence as long as it was at least a hundred miles from London.

Not a few glances had been cast on the pretty, pale young woman sitting with a bundle on her lap; and a pair of thin French shoes upon her feet, at the most remote corner of a bench, looking ill, and frozen, and frightened—looking really very strange.

One of the porters, taking pity on her forlorn-looking condition, advanced with a roll of his towel, and said—

"Got any luggage, miss?"

For all reply she clutched her bundle convulsively, and shook her head.

He was evidently at a loss to classify her, and he took off his cap and scratched his head as he stared at her common old shawl, her bundle, and yet her face was not that of a young woman of his own rank in life. Who was she?

"I beg pardon; but you do look mighty cold and down. There's good hot coffee going now at the refreshment-bar. Suppose you have a cup? It will warm you a bit."

She jumped at the idea, after her wet cold night and morning spent in streets and station, and got up stiffly, and walked slowly after him in the direction of the bar.

He was very much astonished, indeed, to receive half-a-crown for his civility, and all that Georgie gained by such generosity was a certain amount of pity as being "a poor half-witted creature who did not know one coin from another, and was not safe to be going about alone."

The station was filling fast, and the hurry and commotion increasing every moment, for the half-past seven express was just about to start for Birmingham.

"Where is that train going to?" inquired Georgie of her friend the porter, pointing towards it with a bare hand.

"To Birmingham, miss. It's the morning express."

"Oh, to Birmingham! It will do as well as any other place," she said, half to herself.

But the porter heard her, and his first suspicions were naturally confirmed.

"Please, get me a ticket, single, second-class," handing him a five-pound note.

She was certainly not fit to be trusted with money. She had no purse, but carried all her wealth in a corner of her pocket-handkerchief. She was soon afterwards seated in the corner of a carriage, the only occupant, save one, a lady, who had got in briskly at almost the very last moment—a lady in plain black, with a very close bonnet and thick veil, dressed in the style of an Anglican sister.

After a time she raised this veil, and began to look about her and to settle some small parcels, and in doing so her eye fell on Georgie, who was gazing out of the window in a dazed, stupid sort of way.

She looked again, much harder this time, and with an expression of incredulous horror. Then, moving up quite opposite to her, she bent over and said, in a singularly sweet, clear voice—

"It is not possible that I am speaking to Mrs. Vernon—to Georgie Vernon, of Alton Manor?"

Georgie stared at her vacantly; then, recognising a face familiar in happier days, that seemed so long ago that they belonged to another life, she only replied by bursting into tears.

These tears relieved her, and, after a few soothing words from her former friend, that lady continued—

"And what is the meaning of this? Are you in trouble? Why are you alone?"

"Terrible, dreadful trouble—trouble that has nearly killed me! Have you not heard?" she gasped.

"Nay, my dear, I have heard nothing. I am out of the world, in one sense, as if I were dead—the world you and I lived in. Since I lost my husband I have devoted myself to this life," touching her dress, "to nursing the sick, to helping other people in distress. It has taken my mind away from self. I am very happy now. You must let me help you. Tell me your trouble. I have not forgotten how you, a gay young girl, I may say, came and sympathised most tenderly with me in mine."

And could it be, she asked herself, with a pang, that this heart-broken-looking creature before her had ever been the bright, beautiful, admired Georgie Vernon, the gayest of the gay, the happiest of the happy, the cynosure of every eye! What had she done, or what had befallen her that she was reduced to such a plight?

"You would help me, I know, if you could; but I am almost past help," said her companion, shaking her head.

"That could not be. You must never despair—never! Try and tell me your story, dear," leaning forward, and taking one of her cold hands between her own. "At least it will relieve you to speak to me, a friend. Confide in me you may; for whatever you tell me shall never pass my lips. I am sure I can help you in some way."

And thus adjured, Georgie, lamely and timidly, began her strange story, looking every now and then into Mrs. Maitland's kind, brown eyes, as if to ask if it was not such a lot as had never fallen to any woman before? Mrs. Maitland was an elderly lady of about fifty, whose husband died quite suddenly, and whose only son had been drowned at sea.

She had no ties, and she had dedicated her large fortune, and the rest of her life, to labouring for others, and belonged to a nursing sisterhood, where she was no longer known as Mrs. Maitland but as Sister Katherine, a very useful, important person.

She listened intently, as gradually finding her words flow freer, and faster and faster

Georgie unfolded her first foolish marriage, and its most terrible consequences; painful, with tears streaming down her thin cheeks, the uprooting of her home, then her solitary life at the Bower; lastly, her long, bitter imprisonment, bringing her story down to the very present moment when she was sitting, hand in hand, with Sister Katherine in the railway carriage.

"And so you have escaped?" exclaimed that lady, drawing a long sigh of relief. "Escaped to fall into my hands! How glad I am now that I did not wait for the last train! You poor, forlorn Georgie, it was intended that I should meet you and take care of you, and I will. You say you just got into the first train by chance? My dear, there is no such thing as chance! You will come home with me; the Sisters will give you shelter. Do not trouble your mind about that man any more. You will find a haven with us!"

"Oh! Mrs. Maitland, if I could but think so! But you little know him. He discovered me before!"

"Yes, by treachery. There will be no treachery this time. You will find a harbour now, after all your storms—a safe, sheltering harbour—where you will be at peace."

This haven was the headquarters of a large nursing sisterhood in Birmingham, that had branches in several places, convalescent homes at the seaside, another in the country, that, besides providing attendance in hospitals and private houses, had a large hospital on the premises for sick children. It was the centre—the mainspring—of a very great charitable organisation.

Everyone was quick, quiet, busy; everything was done thoroughly and in order, every place was spotlessly clean.

Georgie was heartily welcomed, not merely as a weary, worn-out woman, but as a friend of Sister Katherine's; and after a day or two's rest she began to revive—to have some energy as of old in her movements, some colour on her cheeks; but all this colour was suddenly banished, even from her very lips, when her eyes casually fell on the full account of "the murder in Gordon-square."

She was almost paralysed with horror as she handed it to her friend, Sister Katherine, and said, in a husky voice—

"When you read that you will turn me out of doors! You can hardly help believing that I did it. I could almost fancy it myself! It reads exactly as if I must have done it!"

Sister Katherine, too, became rather paler as she read down the column, and then, raising her eyes, looked full into the pair opposite hers, strained with suspense.

"But you did not, Georgie? I will not believe it, unless from your own lips. When I found you, last Tuesday, you were a terrified, hunted creature, flying for your life, but not a guilty woman, hiding from justice!"

"Oh! Katherine, sister Katherine," now sinking on her knees, and burying her face in her lap, "how good you are to me! You give me faith in myself. My head has been so turned, that I could almost bring myself to fancy that I had done it, though I did not. She did—she must have—that time I heard them quarrelling; and she looked so bad, so strange, when I saw her beneath the gas on the landing she frightened me. It was her, though I cannot prove it, and all the proofs point to me."

And here her overwrought mind could bear no more; she leant forward, heavier and heavier, on Sister Katherine's lap—she had fainted.

Time went on. These two women possessed this secret between them; no one else knew anything of the new sister, who had joined them under Sister Katherine's wing.

She was eager for work, clever, devoted, and rich; she threw herself heart and soul into the very hardest, the most repulsive tasks. She had a natural taste for nursing children especially, and as she did nothing by halves, she went through a regular course of practical

surgery, such as qualified her as a skilled nurse.

Between this and her daily share of work in her special ward she had very little time for dwelling on her sorrows.

There is no panacea for grief like constant, absorbing employment, and a few months had made a very great difference in Georgie Vernon.

She was more self-reliant and independent now than she had ever been all her life, and happier than she had been for many a day. She lay down on her little bed, thoroughly tired after a long day's work, and slept soundly without waking till morning.

Then Gilbert came home. She saw his arrival in the paper, and had written twice to his club, asking him to appoint a meeting, and to write to her at her bankers, but no answer had been vouchsafed to either of these mis-sions.

Then she had sought him out as we have seen, and with what result.

The same night she returned home, at least to what was her home now, and poured out all her wrongs into the sympathising ear of Sister Katherine, and wept and wrung her hands, and was more like an insane young person than the cool, self-possessed, hard-working sister of everyday life.

Sister Katherine (who had been married herself) made excuses for Gilbert to the best of her power. The evidence was so strong—a man went by reasoning, and never by instinct, like a woman. It seemed clear to him of course, but someday—

"Someday!" broke in Georgie, passionately, "I don't care for some day, it must be now—now—or never! Why you, who did not know me half or quarter as well as Gilbert, you be-lieved me—you believed me, and he will not! Oh!—oh! if you had seen his look of horror, of absolute shrinking from me, when I said what he ought to have suggested, that we should be married for the children's sake! I shall never, never forget it! He said I was hardened, too; fancy that! I was not till now! He has hardened me—he has broken my heart—he—. No, I'll never think of him again, Katherine!" pacing up and down the room as she spoke. "From this time I am really one of yourselves, heart and soul. I shall be as if I had no thoughts beyond my duties here—as if all my former life was dead—as if I were a Catholic nun, and had taken the veil."

"And your children?" suggested her companion, in a low voice.

"My children are all here!" waving her hand towards the sick wards. "I will adopt them instead of the two who may never see me, never know me—lest I contaminate them!" speaking with sudden fierceness.

And, despite of soft words occasionally let fall by Sister Katherine, Georgie maintained her resolution—she would have nothing to do with Gilbert, nor her old life.

She was soon afterwards removed to a branch-institution about twenty miles from Birmingham, away from Sister Katherine, among those who knew nothing of her history—nothing beyond the fact that she was one of their most skilled and experienced nurses; that she was very rich, and endowed their funds largely; that she was young and pretty everyone could see for themselves, but utterly indifferent to both facts; and, then, it was supposed that she was single, and had no belongings.

Although she wore no ring—no, she had taken that off now, she was too angry with Gilbert—as to her being married or single no one could possibly tell.

She went by the name of Sister Octavia, but everyone knew that that was a feigned name, and simply taken from the ward to which she had belonged in the Birmingham hospital, No. 8.

She was particularly clever with children, and was very fond of them, and they of her. In a bad case of croup she was invaluable, and so someone remarked to her one day, as she

sat with a child wrapped up, hot out of a bath, on her knee, his head against her shoulder,—

"I see you know all about it, Sister Octavia; you are as clever at this as anyone I ever saw," said another Sister. "You must have had great experience in these cases?"

"Yes, I know all about it," she returned, dreamily, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her mind far away. "My little Alick used to have croup badly."

Her companion looked up at her quickly, for she was one who never had been known to speak of herself or her belongings, much less her past; and what had made a rich, pretty young woman like her cast in her lot with this hard, self-renouncing life?—a love affair, or the pure, unalloyed desire of doing good?

She was reserved, very reserved, indeed, about herself, so this little chance allusion caused the hearer to open her eyes unusually wide.

"Have I said anything?" she asked, as if rousing herself. "I was thinking of other things that this child brings back to me," stroking his hair tenderly as she spoke.

"You spoke of your little Alick having croup, that was all. Was he your child, or your brother?"

"My child. I have two boys, Alick, the eldest, is six, and Jack is nearly five. Ah! I see! you wonder at my being here, don't you? You would not if you knew—but, never mind, please forget I've ever spoken of them, I never will again. It was this child lying in my lap just the way he used to do that made me speak. I wish I had not now. I should think that his bed is warm enough," rising. "He is a big, heavy child, and as sound as a rock. Just hold the light whilst I lay him in. I knew that that hot bath would relieve him."

The other stood shading the candle with her hand whilst the little patient was tucked in, and she could not help noticing that as Sister Octavia strained his counterpane tenderly, and then stooped and kissed one of his little thin hands, she sighed, a sigh of regret—yes, certainly, of regret!

"Never refer to what I have said," said Sister Octavia, standing erect, and looking her full in the face, "I have come here for three things—obscurity, silence, peace!"

CHAPTER XLI.

WINTER has come round again, the third winter since ill-omened Peter Blaine made his ill-omened appearance at the Manor. It is November; hunting is in full swing, for it is what is called a fine open season, and Gilbert Vernon has brought himself and four hunters down to Warwickshire, undeterred by the big brooks in that county, and is staying with an old bachelor friend, one whom he has known for many years, and between them there are other bonds besides—a love of hunting, bordering on a passion.

Colonel Trevor had known Gilbert almost from a boy upward, had known his father before him, and yet, for all that, there was nothing paternal or filial in their relationship towards each other.

Colonel Trevor was the owner of a young head on old shoulders, in some ways, and Gilbert had an old head on young shoulders, so they met half-way.

Colonel Trevor had held a five years' command in India, before that he had been at the Cape.

He had never seen Mrs. Vernon, but he was godfather to her second boy.

Now he had come home—had taken a capital hunting-box, and had bought a string of hunters. He began to look up old friends, Gilbert for one; but what where these rumours he had heard at the Club? "That there had been a screw loose in Mr. Vernon's ménage, that Mrs. V. had bolted!"

But even the most wickedly disposed tongues allowed that she had bolted alone.

Well, it was an ill-wind that blew nobody good. His favourite companion, his keenest brother sportsman, was single once more; and

he, indeed, had always set his face against matrimony in days of yore. What a fool he had been for his pains!

Colonel Trevor grinned to himself and thought how wise he had been; no woman had ever been able to catch him and put a halter round his neck.

Behold him and Gilbert sitting over their wine and cigars alone one evening, after a long but capital day's sport—a case of two horses out apiece, and of two very much above average runs!

"Did you see the Gilby girls, Gilbert," said Colonel Trevor, "on smart-looking hacks at the meet? Not bad-looking young ladies, and pots of money. One of them asked me who you were, and I put in a good word for you, you may be sure. Oh! by George, though!" impatiently, "I'm always forgetting, always putting my foot in it!"

"Forgetting what?" said the other, making a pattern on the mahogany with some broken walnut shells.

"Why, that you are a married man!"

After this there was a silence of fully a minute, and the Colonel began to feel sorry he had spoken—he had been treading on delicate ground—when, much to his relief, his friend replied, without turning his head,—

"I don't wonder at that; I sometimes forget it myself!"

"She's not dead then?" said Colonel Trevor, in an experimental tone, eager to glean all particulars.

"No!" rather shortly.

"Then where is she?" he demanded, point-blank.

"I wish to Heaven I knew!" now raising his head and looking full at his friend.

"You mean," doubtfully, "that you would take her back?"

"Take her back!" he echoed, suddenly standing up and going to the chimney-piece for a light. "It's a case of her taking me back, my good sir; did you not know that?"

"No," also coming to the fire, and now throwing himself into a comfortable chair, "I know nothing about it, excepting that there has been some awful smash-up all round. And so, Gilbert, my boy, it's your fault! I'm surprised at that! We are old friends; now, suppose you sit down there, like a reasonable man, and tell me what you have been up to. It's not—" pausing.

"Not what?" sharply.

"Not another woman, and a case of 'how happy could I be with either, &c., eh?'"

"No," angrily, "it's not that."

"Then what? Speak, and don't be so reserved with me. Come now, out with it."

"I don't like talking about it; it's too bad, somehow—too sore a subject," said the other, sitting down in front of the fire, and looking into the blaze; "but still, you are an old friend, and I think you ought to be told. Yes," with a sudden jerk of a good cigar into the very middle of the fire; "I don't mind if I do tell you, but you must let me hammer along in my own way, and don't interrupt me, or I'll never be able to start again."

"All right, then. I'll not speak, I'll smoke, and the sooner you begin the better. Go ahead, full speed."

"You know," said Gilbert, plunging his hands into his pockets, and still staring at the fire, "that I put up the backs of my relations by marrying my aunt's companion. She was a lady, very pretty, young, and, in short, she suited me down to the ground."

"This was all very well for four years, but one fine day an American-looking chap, with a very seedy kit and a fiery complexion, came along, as they say, and said he was her husband—"

Here Colonel Trevor made some loud, inarticulate ejaculation, and sat up as erect as a poker in his armchair.

"It appears that she was inveigled into a foolish wedding at a registry-office as a mere child, thought him dead and done for, and, unfortunately, never mentioned his existence

to me, being bound by some wretched promise to one of his sisters."

Here Gilbert went on, and quickly sketched the whole story, from the day of Peter's appearance down to his last meeting with Georgie and his interview with Mary Todd, during which time Colonel Trevor, after uttering many painfully-smothered maledictions, had found he could not possibly sit still to listen to it, but was actually pacing the room from end to end, like an enraged tiger in his cage, whilst Gilbert still went on with his story doggedly, though he now was standing up, leaning his back against the chimney-piece. When he had come to the very end, related how he had sought her in vain, and had given up the quest as a bad job, Colonel Trevor stopped, and almost shouted,—

"It's like a thing in a book. By George, it beats anything I ever heard. No wonder, old fellow, you are so grave these times. I never. You are sure you are not pulling my leg though—making it up."

"Making it up! Do I look like making up such a thing as that; come now?" indignantly.

"And you have no idea from Adam where she is?"

"None."

"I would have thought the children would have been a bait to lure her home."

"She hears of them constantly, and, for all I know, sees them on the sly."

"But won't have anything to say to you, eh?—rather hard times. But, candidly speaking, my dear boy, you deserve it all. Yes. When the girl came to you after you got home, crying and praying you to marry her (a good joke that, and she your wife all the time), and you scorned her as that fellow's murderess, it was a fiasco for any innocent young woman, I must say—an awful knock-down blow."

"But the evidence," protested Gilbert.

"Was strong, certainly, but it was a pity you did not give her the benefit of the doubt."

"Yes; but, unfortunately, there was no doubt. Yes, Trevor, it's all very well for you to talk now the whole affair is over; it is very easy to be wise after the event. If you had been in my place you would have just done the same, or worse. Yes; very likely worse, as you are such an awful fool about a pretty face."

"Well, fool or no fool, my good Gilbert, you have got yourself into a nice corner, I must say. You should have backed up your wife through thick and thin."

"But I did not know she was my wife then."

"You were not half sharp enough in looking after that ruffian. He simply walked round you, and she, poor, innocent child, was as wax in his hands. The notion of the fellow coming and separating a married couple—he a bigamist, and levying blackmail and carrying off Mrs. Vernon and locking her up! By Jove! I never heard anything like it, even on the stage. No, never; and for her to be wrongly accused of his murder at the end was enough, in my opinion, to send her out of her mind."

"But it did not; she's all right," put in Gilbert, quickly.

"And you say she has four thousand a-year of her own."

"Yes; at the very least."

"Believe me she's amusing herself at Nice, Monte Carlo, or Cannes this weather, unless she hunts."

"No; I would not let her," shortly.

"Oh! was that the way the wind blew?" with a laugh. "What was sauce for the goose was not sauce for the gander. I'll bet you a cool thou' she is amusing herself on the continent. Of course, I mean in a proper and discreet fashion; and she is perfectly right, from my point of view. She wants a bit of life and variety badly. A pretty young woman—I remember hearing that she was uncommonly pretty—married, no encumbrance, and lots of coin can find plenty of friends."

But this fancy sketch did not appeal to her husband at all. He frowned, he pulled his

moustache, he fidgeted about between the fire and the table, and then burst out,—

"Look here, Trevor, my good man, you don't know her; that's not her form. She's not a society woman."

"Or was not, with you tied to her apron-string! Believe me, she is different now. She wants to give you a good fright, and I dare say she will come home yet."

"I doubt it. All the same, she's not at one of those gambling places abroad, that I'm certain."

"Was she one of your stern, strong-minded, never-give-in, nose-in-the-air style?"

"No, not a bit. I was going to say that she had no will of her own at all, but—"

"But," breaking in, with a loud laugh, "you had better hold hard, for I would not have believed you."

"Well, that's enough. You may laugh, but it's a very painful subject to me. We will never touch upon it again. Now you know everything, and I hope you are satisfied. Where do we meet to-morrow, to change the topic?"

"Meet? When I was coming down Jacobs came and told me that it was freezing like mad. What a nice look-out for King's Norton at twelve, eh?"

"Oh! I don't believe in a hard frost coming in like that. I saw no signs in the sky this evening."

"Well, time will tell. I only hope you are right, and not Jacobs. And if there's a bone in the ground I can't ride Timbertop, as he is a bit tender on his forelegs. I've to ride him in bandages, but he's a nailing mount on a soft day."

Leaving the gentlemen to talk horse we may here mention to the reader that the heroine of the tale was one of the Sisters in the newly-erected hospital for country patients, for out and in, and for children, in the not-distant market town of King's Norton.

(To be continued.)

SINNED AGAINST.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD ST. JOHN and Mrs. Lacy both looked critically at the tall graceful girl whom Mrs. Russell announced to them as her ward—the child entrusted to her care more than twenty years before; both the young nobleman and the gentle widow had fancied their hearts must warm towards Basil St. John's child; they had believed that even a first sight of the girl who had been so cruelly wronged, and whose whole life had been spent in exile from her father's house, they must learn to love her.

But they were mistaken. Margaret stood before them, handsome, graceful, and self-possessed; and she had a style and manner they had never dreamed of, and far more attractions than they had ever pictured in the little lonely heiress, but they felt no attraction towards her.

Margaret looked slowly from one to another of that strange group; then she asked quickly, "What does it mean?"

Neither Lord St. John nor Mrs. Lacy felt inclined to tell her. Seeing their silence, Mrs. Russell took the answer on herself.

"It means, my darling, that your long suspense is over; the trials you have borne so patiently are ended for ever."

Margaret wondered if her mother was going out of her senses; but a swift glance from Mrs. Russell's small ferret-like eyes seemed to forbid her to express either suspense or curiosity; she looked earnestly at Lord St. John.

He felt no attraction towards her, but proofs were proofs; this tall graceful girl was Basil's daughter, and he must bid her welcome to her home.

He advanced towards her with outstretched hands.

"My dear young lady," he said, with a simple manly kindness. "I must welcome you to this house; you are my nearest kinswoman, and I trust you will look on me as a friend."

Meg's beautiful eyes seemed to say that would not be very difficult.

"You may have wondered at the loneliness of your life," went on Stuart, gravely. "You may have marvelled why your relations left you so entirely to this lady's keeping."

"She is my mother!"

"Your mother in affection, dear," said Mrs. Russell, with a kind of choked sob. "I shall always love you as my own child, Meg; but you have come to your rights now."

"My rights?"

Stuart saw her bewilderment, and was rather pleased with it.

"Your father is dead," he said, gently, "and by his will you are his sole heiress—house, furniture, property, plate, and jewels—all is yours unalienably. You are mistress of this place, and as your kinsman—as the head of your family—you must let me bid you welcome."

Mrs. Lacy did not like the sparkle which came to the girl's face.

"Do you mean that I shall be rich?"

"It is not a case of shall be; you are now, at this moment, one of the greatest heiresses in England."

Mrs. Russell bent over Meg affectionately.

"It's quite true, dear," she said, eagerly; "you have come into your own—it sounds just like a fairy tale, and all through me seeing that advertisement in the newspapers."

Meg took to her new honours very simply; but she never inquired as to her father's fate—never asked why he had kept her a stranger to him, or if he had left no other claimants on his fortune. She took her good luck very much as a matter of course, and when Lord St. John and Mrs. Lacy discussed her after her departure, both agreed they had never seen anyone so totally devoid of emotion.

"I don't like her," declared the kind old lady.

Lord St. John fairly laughed.

"Dear Mrs. Lacy, is it fair to judge her on one short interview?"

"She has no heart!"

"Think of how she clung to her adopted mother; she must be affectionate."

Mrs. Lacy shook her head.

"I don't like either of them."

"The fact is," said the nobleman, smiling, "you and I are both disappointed."

"How?"

"We had made up our minds to see a lonely and sorrowful child, who looked as though she had met with scant kindness. We had meant to pet her; we find a self-possessed young lady, whose very calm repels our warm feelings."

"I suppose that is it."

Lord St. John smiled.

"We ought to be pleased."

"Why?"

"Miss St. John will cause us neither trouble nor anxiety; she has every qualification for taking care of herself, and Mrs. Russell will ably second her."

"Do you think—"

Stuart understood her at a word.

"I don't fancy Mrs. Russell is our idea of a lady. I think poverty has made her a little hard and cunning, but I am quite sure she has done her best for Margaret."

"I did not mean that at all."

"What then?"

"Do you think the girl we have just seen is really Lord St. John's daughter?"

Stuart laughed.

"You are too incredulous, dear Mrs. Lacy. Why, I am a lawyer, and yet the proofs are too conclusive for me to feel the slightest doubt of the young lady's identity."

Mrs. Lacy tried to be content, but in spite of her efforts she could not feel interested in Margaret St. John, do what she would.

"It must be my love for Alix blinds me to

her sister's charms," she murmured; then she said slowly,—

"Do you think Sir Clarence Manners will admit Margaret's identity?"

"I fancy he will be compelled."

"I hope he will not vent his disappointment on Alix."

"I trust not."

"I suppose Miss St. John will not restore any of the property to Alix. Of course, in point of law, everything is hers; but seeing she must know her father meant to provide for his other child, that it is the nearest chance all comes to herself—"

Stuart shook his head.

"I shall tell Miss St. John the state of the case. Sir Clarence has behaved abominably to us all; but for Alix's sake I will not let him have a penniless bride without a struggle."

Meanwhile Margaret and Mrs. Russell had driven back to their shabby lodgings. It was characteristic of the pair that neither spoke the whole length of the journey; only when they were in their own little parlour, Meg tossed her hat on the sofa and turned to her mother, repeating the question she had asked already in Park-lane.

"What does it mean?"

"Surely you know!"

"I know nothing. I feel that, considering my ignorance, I acted my part splendidly, but I might make mistakes in the future; you had better tell me all."

Mrs. Russell bolted the door.

"I never thought to see this day," she said, proudly. "Meg, a grander position than I dreamed of will be yours; as Miss St. John, one of the richest heiresses in England, half London will be at your feet."

Meg's eyes sparkled.

"Only I am not Miss St. John."

Mrs. Russell would not hear her.

"It fits in perfectly. The child was entrusted to me twenty years ago—I have the proofs of the transaction—her name was Margaret. I present to them a girl of twenty, one who has been called Margaret all her life. I show the father's letters, his portraits—there is no room for doubt."

"It is a splendid stake we are playing for," said Meg, slowly; "but—"

"But what; are you afraid?"

"No; only there is a risk."

"I see none."

"What of Meg?"

Mrs. Russell shuddered for a moment, then her face grew cruel and stern.

"She is dead."

"We have no proofs of that."

"I tell you she is dead. What would she have done for daily bread—for food and shelter—all these weeks, if she had been alive?"

"But if she should be," persisted Meg.

"It will make no difference; she will never connect the beautiful heiress, Margaret St. John, with Margaret Russell."

"Perhaps not."

"And the people we knew at Mackstone could make no difficulty. The worst anyone can say is that I always strove to make you above your station; I can hardly be blamed for that. No, Meg, if we both keep up our courage we have no cause for fear. We are playing for high stakes, but we shall win."

"I'm sure I hope so. I didn't half like that woman and the way she looked at me."

"Mrs. Lacy! She is nothing but an old governess. We'll soon clear the house of her!"

"And Lord St. John?"

"He is your nearest kinsman."

"He is a very handsome man."

"Aye! and young and unmarried."

"What are you driving at, mother?"

"Why, nothing would make your position so sure as becoming his wife."

"Why?"

"Don't you see he is probably the heir-at-law. If your father had had no child everything would have gone to him."

"But I don't like him."

"That's nonsense!"

"He is not my style. His eyes seem to read one through and through."

"What if they do?"

"I should always be fancying they read my secret. No, mother mine, the less we see of Lord St. John and his friends the better. We will strike out a new line, all for ourselves. People shall show that grave, sarcastic-looking nobleman and his Puritanical housekeeper that they know how to appreciate beauty such as mine. I will be the favourite of the season next spring. I will rule over people's hearts, and then, when I have enjoyed life thoroughly, I shall marry."

Mrs. Russell sighed.

"I shall never feel easy until you are married. I feel a little afraid of Lord St. John."

"I don't. Mother, we must keep our heads cool; it is the only way to get on. Really, I begin to think May did us a service she little dreamed of when she made that strange lonely fitting."

"This position would have been quite thrown away upon May, a timid, blushing child. She would never hold her own as heiress of the St. Johns."

Lord St. John had expressed his intention of calling on his cousin the next day, but neither Margaret or her mother expected him so early as he came. Breakfast was barely cleared away when Stuart made his appearance, accompanied by a grave, elderly man whom he announced as Mr. Cameron.

The newcomer shook hands warmly.

"I was your father's trusted friend and adviser," he told Margaret, quietly. "It is a pleasure to me to meet his eldest daughter."

"Have I a sister?" asked Miss St. John, with just the faintest perception of a shadow on her face. She was not best pleased to think that, perhaps, she would receive only a portion of her father's wealth.

"You have," returned Mr. Cameron, "a half sister—one of the sweetest, fairest girls in London."

Meg looked sulky.

"She might have come to welcome me."

"It was not in her power, poor child!"

"Do you mean that she is ill?"

"No, but she is in great trouble. Fancy her bereavement! A fortnight ago she was living happily with her parents, their idolized darling, and now—"

"She is an orphan," said Meg, coldly.

"Well, there are plenty of other orphans in the world, Mr. Cameron; my half-sister need not think herself an exception."

Both the gentlemen looked troubled.

"You do not understand," said Mr. Cameron.

"The case of Alix St. John is singularly sad. She was a beauty and an heiress, beloved by all who knew her to be her father's only child. In one day she lost both her parents; the next she learned that she was portionless. By his will, made before her birth, and which he culpably neglected to alter, Lord St. John left all his property to his eldest child. Alix is absolutely penniless."

A gleam of triumph crossed Margaret's face. A penniless rival she did not fear. The thought even crossed her mind whether Alix St. John might not be as useful to her in her prosperity as little May had been in the days of her pinching and contrivance.

"I should like to see her."

Mr. Cameron thought he had aroused her pity.

"I was quite sure you would say that. I felt that the daughter of a noble race like the St. Johns would not take a mean advantage of a legal flaw which placed her sister at the mercy of her liberality."

"I don't understand."

"Your object in wishing to see your sister is doubtless to assure her you intend to share with her the fortune of your late father. You have the generosity to think it unfair that one daughter should be richly dowered and the other penniless."

Margaret frowned.

"I think nothing of the kind. This girl"—she spoke almost contemptuously—"has had her share of prosperity. All her life she has been pampered and cared for, while I was an alien from my father's house; while his eldest child was an uncared-for outcast Alix reigned supreme in my father's heart. I daresay if he had not died suddenly he would have carried his partiality yet further, and stripped me of all my rights to enrich her at my expense."

The gentlemen stood dumbfounded; they could hardly believe their ears that a woman, young and fair as Margaret St. John, should be so lost to all kindly, generous feeling.

"Quite right, my dear," said Mrs. Russell, approvingly; "I am glad you show a proper spirit."

"Hush!" interrupted Lord St. John, coldly; "madam, will you have the goodness to remember that Miss St. John is now restored to her proper guardians; she no longer needs your advice and approval. The less she has of your influence the better, if she owes her worthiness and love of self-interest to your training."

He had spoken plainly, but he was angry. Meg crossed the room to her mother's side.

"You will never separate us—never. She has been a mother to me, all my life, and I won't forsake her."

"You will kindly return to the dismission of business, Miss St. John," said her cousin, stiffly. "By your father's will I am appointed your guardian. I have to choose both your house and companions until you marry."

"In fact I am to be a kind of state prisoner."

"I never said so."

"I can see it all," broke from the heartless girl. "You are in love with Alix St. John, and you want my money to help you to support her in accordance with your wealth."

A crimson flush dyed the young man's face. That any woman, especially one of his name, should so forget herself was terrible to him.

"You are under some strange mistake," he said, haughtily. "I never saw your sister until she had become another's."

"Another's?"

"Miss Alix St. John had been engaged before her father's death," he went on, slowly. "She was married privately last week, and is now the wife of Sir Clarence Manners."

"What a pity," said Meg, sweetly. "I was going to suggest she should live with us. She could have helped my maid with the needlework, or made herself useful in some other way in return for a home."

Stuart looked at her with scorn.

"And you are Basil St. John's daughter? It seems incredible."

"Does it?" sweetly. "I am afraid it's a fact."

Stuart rose; he felt the interview had lasted long enough.

"There will be some necessary formalities to go through," he said, stiffly; "but I daresay in a few days you can be installed in your rights."

"I am glad to hear it. I have been defrauded of them long enough. Oh, and, Lord St. John, I will trouble you to see that my house is free from all intruders."

"I beg your pardon."

"The person I saw there last night is extremely distasteful to me."

"You may be quite sure, Miss St. John, that Mrs. Lacy will not trespass on you."

"I thought, perhaps, you would be trying to instal her in Park-lane as housekeeper."

"Mrs. Lacy is a lady"—he laid a stress on the word—"of independent means. She needs nothing at your hands, Miss St. John. As your father's valued friend she would have shown all kindness to his motherless daughter, but I am sure when she hears of this interview she will feel she has no desire to improve your acquaintance."

Margaret felt she had gone a little too far.

She tried to undo the impression she had made.

"You must not be hard upon me," she said, with the smile her mother thought so irresistible. "Remember I have all the world against me. You and everyone else are hating me because I stand in my sister's way."

Lord St. John shook his head.

"No one had such a thought."

"Well, you will forgive me, and let us be friends?"

He hesitated.

"I shall always serve your interest to the best of my power; for your father's sake I shall be happy to spare you any trouble or annoyance, but I don't think we will speak of friendship."

"Why not?"

"There are some things a man does not forget lightly, Miss St. John. You have twice insulted my honour since I entered this room."

He did not see her outstretched hand; he passed to the door with a stately bow. Mr. Cameron imitated him, neither took the slightest notice of Mrs. Russell, and that lady hated both on the spot.

"Cameron," said the younger man, bitterly, when they were out in the open street, and he hurried on impatiently, as though to walk off the impatience that consumed him, "did you ever meet with such an odious woman?"

"It is Mrs. Russell's fault."

"Partly, I suppose; but Margaret is free from her control now; she is her own mistress."

"And that pretty child; really, Lord St. John, it's enough to make one rail at Providence. Why should a pretty creature like Miss Alix—I mean Lady Manners—be robbed for such a vixen as her half-sister?"

"The sin of the fathers, I suppose," returned the younger man, dreamily; "but in this case it's the sin of the mother. If Lady St. John had allowed her stepchild to grow up in her father's home she could hardly be the selfish mercenary young woman she has just proved herself."

"Who is to tell Lady Manners?"

"I don't know. I feel disgusted with the whole business."

"It is worst for her."

"I don't know. Sir Clarence must be good to her unless he's a brute."

"He's as poor as a church mouse, Lord St. John. He's looked to a rich wife to free him from his difficulties."

"He'd best have waited for Margaret St. John. She would have been more fitted to cope with him than her sister."

"I suppose we ought to call."

"I don't see it."

But they were spared the decision. That very morning, as they sat in consultation in the library, they heard a tremendous knock at the hall door. A moment later and the girl, who had once been the sunshine of the house, entered.

It was not a week since she had left her old home at her husband's side, but, oh, how fearfully changed! Alix looked as if she had been ill for months; she was pale as marble, only there was an ominous redness about her eyes, which sparkled with unnatural brilliancy. She walked forward towards Mr. Cameron; then at sight of the well-remembered room her courage failed her, and she burst into tears.

Very tenderly the old man placed her in a chair by the open window, very gently he told her to compose herself, and tell him the cause of her distress. After a few moments she grew calm.

"I never cared for money before," she said, wearily. "I used to think I could be happy in a cottage."

Stuart looked at her pitifully; he guessed what had changed her sentiments.

"Is it true?"

"My dear child, what is true?"

"That she is found."

"Who?"

But, alas! he knew.

"Margaret Lucy St. John—papa's heiress."

Neither of them attempted to deceive her. She read the answer in their faces.

"Clarence heard it this morning," went on the young man, bitterly, "and he sent me here."

"He sent you?"

"He says," went on Alix, in a dull, heavy tone, like a child repeating a lesson, "that if she knew everything she would give back a portion of the money."

"Alix, has it come to that?" said Lord St. John, sadly. "Has your husband shown you already that he is disappointed at the loss of your fortune?"

Women like she tried to defend him.

"It is so hard on him," she cried. "His house is mortgaged, and he is quite poor. It was difficult for him to keep himself; how is he to manage now he is burdened with a wife?"

"He ought to think you a blessing, Alix, not a burden."

"It is not his fault," she pleaded. "You must not be angry with Clarence."

"My dear child," said Stuart, speaking to her much as he might have done had she been eight years old instead of eighteen, "we shall never get on if you talk like this. Mr. Cameron is your father's oldest friend; I am your cousin, surely you can trust us? Tell me, Alix, how we can help you?"

Bit by bit it all came out. Sir Clarence and his mother from the first had comforted themselves by a belief that the missing heiress would never be discovered, that Alix would succeed in time indisputably to her father's wealth. They had so fully persuaded themselves of this that it came upon them like a thunderclap when they heard of last night's events.

(To be continued.)

A PERFECT WOMAN.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

PAULINE stole out to Donzell.

"Will you go back to the house, and tell Aunt Mary I shall not be home to-night? She must not be left alone."

But he broke in, hastily,—

"I cannot consent to your remaining here. It is not right that you should breathe the same air with her. She has brought all this upon herself. Let some other stay by her to comfort her; it is too much to ask of you. I hate to think she may touch your hand—may even win words of tenderness from you."

"Oh," she interrupted, "you don't speak like yourself. To-morrow you will think with me. Go now, dear friend, and try not to blame me overmuch. I am sure if my father could know he would bid me stay with her, because of the love we once bore her;" and reluctantly he left her.

Then she went back to the distracted mother, who did not speak until she had sobbed herself into a state of helplessness; then she took away the little babe, and laid it on the bed, and drew Alison into the room where she had found her.

"Heaven help you!" she said, and the words seemed wrong from her lips.

Alison looked up, the tears streaming down her thin cheeks; she had not hoped to hear such words from this wronged woman.

"Oh!" she cried, "how good you are to me? Sit down here, close by me, and let me tell you my story; to-morrow I will go away. Thank Heaven, I shall not live long now! I only lived for baby, and she is gone. Try to believe me when I say I never meant to wrong you—that I prayed to be kept a true wife—but I was so weak and he so strong."

"A week before your wedding Stuart wrote me begging an interview, as I had consistently avoided him since Mr. Ardoyne's warning,

I yielded—oh, that I had not!—and meeting him at some distance from the village, was induced to promise I would see him again the following night."

"Ah, Heaven! how miserable I was! I crept about with a heavy load of guilt in my heart, making me afraid to meet your eyes. I shrank from your caresses and my husband's; knowing how little I deserved them. Day after day we met in secret; and on the eve of your wedding he implored me to fly with him—he had made all arrangements, counting on my consent, and alas! alas! I gave it. He told me Mr. Fossanet would at once get a divorce, and we would be married. In the grey of the morning I stole out; Stuart was waiting me in a hired carriage which we left at the station. We went first to France, afterwards to Portugal, and stayed at Lisbon. But I was very wretched—I had no smiles, no gay talk, and Stuart hated sadness of any kind. At first he thought my grief natural and tried to make me forget it, afterwards he grew impatient and sought pleasure in other company than mine, and my guilty heart felt broken. Soon our money was all gone, and Stuart wrote Mr. Ainslie for his usual allowance, but he replied he would not forward another shilling unless Stuart left me; he was not quite weary of me then, so he kissed me and made light of this trouble. One by one we sold the trinkets he had bought me, and lived so for a time. Then my baby was born, and I prayed it might die because of its heritage of shame; and Stuart seemed to hate it, saying,—

"There were three now to keep instead of two."

"He got employment as guide and interpreter to English visitors, and we lived some weeks in that way. Then Stuart wrote again to his father. This time he did not show me the letter nor the reply that came, but I found the latter accidentally, and the cruel words made me cry out in my agony of fear and love. Mr. Ainslie said he would pardon the past if Stuart would at once leave the 'wanton wretch' who had destroyed the peace of two homes, and he should advise him to travel a few months—until the scandal was a little forgotten, and the Fossanets could bear to hear his name spoken."

"When Stuart came in I told him what I had read, and implored him, for the sake of our child, not to leave me. He said harshly he had been a fool long enough, and had now come to his senses, and intended taking his birthright, at whatever cost. I wept and prayed for pity, seeing love had died out. I held his child to him; she had his eyes and she smiled up at him; but he was not moved, he was so weary—so weary of us both. Then I prayed him to remember all I had lost for his sake—my name, my home, my peace of mind. He answered I should have thought of that before."

"Oh! Heaven! that he could have been so false—so cruel! In a few days he received a remittance from Mr. Ainslie, and he told me he should leave me the following morning. In vain I cried and prayed for pity, and in my anguish I said,—

"Even he whom I wronged would be more merciful to me."

"Go to him," he retorted; "he will not know you. He has gone mad with shame for your shame."

"And when I heard that I fainted. I don't know how long a time passed before I came to myself, but when I asked for Stuart they told me he was gone. He had left some money behind and I cast it down upon the ground, moaning I would not touch it—would not use it; but in the end I was obliged to do so for my baby's sake."

"I came to England, and I felt that I was growing gradually weaker. Soon she would have no protector, and I dreaded to think what she would become. My money was very nearly gone; so I made haste to reach my home, walking all the way, but when I reached the Rectory they closed the doors upon me and drove me away. Then it flashed into my mind that Stuart might have returned, and

surely he would do something for his own child. I asked nothing for myself but a place to die in.

"So I came on here and entered the village in a tremor, lest I should be recognised; but though folks looked at me curiously no one knew me. And at last, faint, footsore, and hungry, I reached Mr. Ainslie's. I asked for the squire, and was told he was not at home; then I inquired for Stuart, and was answered sharply that he was not in the country. Not knowing what to do, I turned away dejectedly, and in the grounds met Mr. Ainslie. I begged him to have pity on me, told him who I was, and whose child I carried in my arms.

"He raved and swore at me, called me many a hard name that I deserved only too well. But, oh! I think, had our cases been reversed, had I stood in his place and he in mine, I could not have said those dreadful things. He hoped my child would be taken from me.

"Heaven! how soon he has seen the fulfilment of his hope. I stole away, feeling there was but one resource left me. Oh! believe, it was not for my sake I came—that never would I have recalled myself to your memory but for his child and mine. Now it is dead, and I will go away again, to die as she died—of hunger and cold. I thought I could reach the house, but I was too weak; fasting often for a day and a night does not make one strong."

She ceased, and a terrible cough racked the thin, worn figure. Pauline waited until she had recovered the attack, then she spoke quietly and firmly,—

"You must feel that you cannot stay here—that you and I can have nothing in common; but for the love I once bore you, and for my father's sake, I will not see you want. Rest here to-night, and to-morrow I will think what to do."

The unhappy woman caught one jewelled hand in hers and kissed it; swift as lightning Pauline drew it away, but when she saw the anguish on Alison's face she relented.

"Heaven forgive me!" she said, brokenly; "if you sinned deeply, you have been most sorely punished. But, oh! how could you do it?—how could you do it? See what a wretched woman you have made me! You broke my father's heart and stole his reason."

But Alison did not hear; she had fallen back in a deadly swoon; and when she revived was too weak for further speech, and Pauline sat by her until the morning. Then she went home, first telling the lodge-keeper who Alison was, and commanding him to keep the secret.

She found Denzil in the breakfast-room with her aunt, and both were strongly prejudiced against her return to the lodge.

Denzil admitted that, for humanity's sake, Alison should be supplied with all necessities, and that Doctor Beck should attend her; but he grew hot and almost angry when Pauline persisted that she should go back to the unhappy woman, "for my father's sake," and asked if Alison had ever considered her father, or any but her own inclinations?

But Pauline was firm, and in the middle of the morning went back to her post, leaving Mr. Fossanet in Burrell's care.

She found Doctor Beck with the invalid, and he declared she must not be moved—that she was in a dying condition. He asked Pauline if she knew her friends, and she answered quietly,—

"She has none. Doctor, how long will she live?"

"A few days at most. She is in the last stage of consumption. It is very sad."

But the girl thanked Heaven in her heart that the weak, sinful life was nearly ended.

What would the world bring of peace to an erring wife, a dishonoured, deserted woman? It was best for all that Alison Fossanet should pass away; that one grave should hold the mother and the babe.

Alison did not ask to see her child any more, and when it was carried out of the house she shed no tear—made no outcry; she seemed beyond those things then. She did not take to her bed, but lay on a couch, with closed lids

and ghastly face, not feeling any acute pain; only a deep languor that would not be shaken off.

The villagers talked amongst themselves of the woman dying at the lodge, and wondered much who she was, and where she came from; and in answer to all their questions, the lodge-keeper and his wife said she was a distant relative, whose husband was dead.

Pauline was compelled often to omit her daily walk with her father, and he would whimper and wonder, in a feeble way, why she so often left him.

One day, with the cunning which always accompanies madness, he contrived to elude Burrell's vigilance, and followed stealthily in Pauline's steps. He saw her enter the cottage—saw, too, the woman hanging clothes at the back; and so he swiftly crossed from his hiding-place to the door, and pushing it open, entered.

He heard voices in the inner room, and one was the voice of his child. The other—ah! even to his disordered brain it seemed familiar, and he made a strenuous effort to remember where and when it had sounded in his ears. And a troubled look rested on his face, whilst reason that had been sleeping so long flickered feebly in his eyes.

He went on and entered the room. Pauline did not see him, for her back was towards him; but she heard hard breathings and half-articulate words, and, starting, seized his hands, crying, in her dread,—

"Father!"

But his eyes had passed beyond her to a figure on a couch. He could not see the face, because white hands had gone up to cover it.

"Who is it?" he questioned, in a hoarse whisper. "Pauline, Pauline, who is it?" and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets. "She had hair like that!" remembering his wife then for the first time for many months.

"Pauline said, soothingly,—

"It is a poor sick woman, a friend of Mrs. Lorton's," but he broke away from her.

"You are deceiving me! Let me see her face!"

"She clung about him.

"For Heaven's sake, no, father!"

Weeping, sobbing, crying out that she dared not meet his gaze again, Alison fell at his feet, with her arms clasped about him.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!"

He stooped and lifted her, put the hair back from her face.

"Ah, Heaven!" he cried, "my wife!" and in that moment reason reasserted her sway.

He put the sobbing woman from him, looked a moment on the wasted, drooping figure, the changed, once lovely face; then he said, mournfully and gently, as if his anguish left no space for anger or reproach,—

"You have suffered, too. Ah! I forgive you! But I can't bear to look on you. Where is my child? Pauline, Pauline, help me home! I think I have got my death-blow," and she led him away, knowing now that he, too, must soon leave her."

After that Alison sank rapidly. The sight of her husband hastened her end. The knowledge that she had made a wreck of his health, reason, and happiness crushed her, and she never rallied from the shock.

One day she sat up, writing a few lines to her parents in farewell, and praying them when she was dead to remember her as she had been in her early girlhood. When she had finished she seemed very tired and glad to lie down.

Pauline questioned,—

"Is there any other message you wish written—anything I can say for you?"

But Alison shook her head. Since she told her wretched story she had never spoken of Stuart—never referred to him in any way.

It was late when Miss Fossanet walked home, and she went very slowly, for her mind was full of bitter and sad thoughts. Half-way through the grounds she met Denzil.

"You look weary," he said, offering his arm,

and when she declined it he took her hand with gentle force, and laid it there.

"I am tired," she said, with a faint attempt to smile, "but not nearly so tired as miserable. Mr. Ardoyne, sometimes I think my heart is broken; sometimes I feel I could die of it, only, you see, grief never does kill, unless some purely physical agent is called in to help."

She lifted her lovely purple eyes to his, and saw his face was strangely agitated, and cried,—

"Oh, you have been telling me I am weary, and I was selfish enough not to notice what you would not say—that 'you are ill.'"

But he interrupted,—

"Neither ill nor exhausted, only a little worried with thoughts that will come. Thinking is a very foolish habit, and, having only lately acquired it, it rather takes it out of me. Go on talking, please, without noticing me."

She was glad to do this. He was her only confidante, and with him she gained a sense of calmness and strength that she found nowhere else; so she went on, in her low tones,—

"There is no one left to me now but Aunt Mary and my father. All the old friends have fallen away; and oh! do you not see it—do you not see it? Father is dying day by day, so slowly that no one seems to heed it, save me. When he is gone I shall, indeed, be alone."

Denzil could bear it no longer. All the pent-up love of long months rose to overwhelm him with its resistless force. Pride, reserve, prudence—all alike were forgotten as he turned and caught her to him.

"Not alone, my love! Never alone while I live!"

She struggled away from him.

"Mr. Ardoyne! oh, Mr. Ardoyne!"

"Reproach me," almost fiercely, "say the hardest and cruellest thing a woman's heart can conceive, only do not forbid me to give up hope. Love you! Yes. Oh, Heaven! I loved you when he was all in all to you, and in all my life I have loved no other woman. I don't ask you to come to me now, when she has reopened the cruel wound. I am willing to wait as long as you may choose. Love, my love! don't forbid me to hope! Say that one day in the future your heart will turn to me, cling to me; that I shall be your lover, husband, protector! For Heaven's sake speak, Pauline!"

Oh! the pity of that pale, most lovely face! the pain in the purple eyes! Between them all formality was forgotten—ended for ever—as she laid her hand on his arm.

"Denzil, dear friend, it cannot be. Perhaps if we had met before I saw him we might now be all in all each to the other. But I think my heart is dead! I have no power to love you! Oh! let us be friends, dear friends, now and always; but I cannot bid you hope. I dare not deceive you!"

"I am answered," steadily and quietly having regained his composure. "I shall not trouble you again with my story. Yes; we will be friends—all shall be as you wish."

They walked back side by side, but he would not go in with her.

"I should be a dull companion to-day; I will come to-morrow early. Good-bye, Pauline."

In the dead of the night one summoned her to Alison's bed. She dressed quickly, and went out into the clear, cold, frosty night, and remembered, with a shudder, as she went, that other midnight excursion she had taken. Ah! how long ago it seemed; she had buried all her love and her hopes then, on the day that should have seen her a happy bride.

Putting such thoughts resolutely away, she hastened on, and, entering Alison's room, found Doctor Beck already there.

"I can do no more for her," he said, in a whisper, "she is sinking fast!"

Pauline sat down by the bed and took one fluttering hand in her own. Slowly the dying eyes opened and rested a moment on the dark

face bending low; then the words came pleadingly,—

"Kiss me, Pauline!"

And with no sign of loathing or hesitation the girl kissed the failing lips.

"Forgive? Forgive?"

"I have forgiven you, now; but it was very hard to do. He forgives you, too!"

"Heaven has been good," she said, and her voice was all but inaudible.

Suddenly she started up in bed, and threw up her arms with a low cry, then fell back upon her pillows, and so was dead.

Doctor Beck drew Pauline away.

"Miss Fossanet," he said, "you are an angel! That poor soul was——"

"My father's wife!" gravely.

And he saw her beautiful eyes were full of tears.

"You knew this all the time, and yet nursed her as though she had never sinned against you and yours," he went on, in his astonishment; "such women as you are Heaven's best gifts to men; unfortunately, we too often don't appreciate them!"

"Doctor," she said, "few know who she was, only those in whom I was compelled to confide. You will keep silence about this?" and he answered "Yes."

Then Pauline went back to the deathroom, and found that already they had closed the eyes and composed the limbs, so she stole away again and went home through the wintry dawn.

Alison was buried by her baby, and no headstone marked her resting-place, but when the grass grew and flowers began to bloom, it was carefully tended, because the man who had loved her and forgiven her would have it so.

Slowly all memories of the past came back to Mr. Fossanet, but it seemed he no longer had the power to suffer acutely, only a gentle melancholy settled upon him, and day by day he grew feebler, frailer, older, and Pauline knew that he was passing away from her.

Denzil came every day, and the old friendly relations existing between them were renewed, only in her heart of hearts Pauline cherished the knowledge of his love, because it seemed good to her in those days to know one man held her dearer than life, or wealth, or country.

But it was not easy for Denzil to meet her on the old familiar footing; not easy to refrain from telling her again and again of his love, to implore her to reconsider her decision, and only a strong man could have played the part he played. Often at night, when alone, he would mutter, "too hard, too hard; I will go away, perhaps it will be less cruel if we do not meet!" but in the morning he called himself coward and traitor, and played again his daily part with a gentleness and courtesy that never failed.

CONCLUSION.

MR. FOSSANET had been laid in the ground nine months, and his daughter lived a solitary life at Rookwood; then there came news of Stuart Ainslie's return, and she, growing a little pale, shivered and wondered that he could so easily forget the past and come again to his own home. She saw him once at church, and his eyes fell before hers; in his heart he thought she had never been so beautiful as then; weak, vacillating, his passion had turned a second time to Pauline; but he was hopeless now of winning her until his father urged the proverbial constancy of the Fossanets.

"She loves you yet, I believe," the old man said; "go in and win her; she is a perfect woman, and would make you happy."

So Stuart, afraid to plead in person, wrote "the perfect woman," asking her pardon for his great offence, swearing his sin had been the result of fascination, but that his love had always been hers; praying she would let him come to her and plead his own cause, protesting her happiness should be his lifelong study.

Pauline crushed the letter in her hand—a smile of supremest scorn breaking the line of

her lips; then she took her hat and went out, and as she walked her heart grew hot with indignation at his boldness; he the seducer, the murderer, of Alison, the destroyer of her father's reason and her own happiness; he to ask her love a second time!

"How dare he?" she said, between her shut teeth. "Oh! he is baser than even I thought." She went quickly to the churchyard, unconscious that he followed her; she lingered long by her father's grave, and he dared not join her; then she went on again, and did not pause until she stood in the midst of nameless mounds.

Stuart went hastily forward. "Pauline," he cried, and at the sound of his unforgotten voice, she turned white and cold and proud. She waited for him to speak again. "My love, my love, I have come for my answer."

Then she pointed to two graves at her feet. "It lies there, Stuart Ainslie," she said, clearly and coldly, and when he seemed not to understand, added, "There lies the woman you ruined and deserted, and at your feet is all that remains of your child; now, if you dare, ask me to forget the past, to listen to the tale of your love." Here she flashed into anger, "Liar, seducer, murderer—for you *did* murder her; she died of hunger, cold, shame, and a broken heart; think again of my father—his outraged love, his despair, his madness."

But Stuart stayed to hear no more; he turned and left her with drooping head and numbed heart, knowing that for him there could be no union with her, that her old love was dead. And in the days to come he grew a wretched misanthrope, and because he could not win her, longed with sick longing for her love, and for her sake lived a lonely, selfish life until the end.

For very long Denzil had felt he could not endure the misery of his present life, he was losing his self-control, so he determined to leave Mildred House and travel; and a few days after Stuart received his *congé*, he went to Rookwood to tell Pauline of his intended departure and to wish her good-bye.

Entering the gardens he saw a tall black-robed figure moving amongst the flowers, and went hurriedly in that direction.

"Pauline," he said, after their commonplace greetings, "I have come to say good-bye; I leave this place to-morrow."

She looked blankly at him. "Going—and to-morrow! Is this not very sudden, Denzil," and he thought her face was paler.

"It is rather," in a reckless tone; "but I am tired of life here—you want me no longer, and I think it just as well to go, and to make our parting brief. You know what a struggle I shall find it to part from you," his face was agitated; "for Heaven's sake say good-bye now, and let me go."

She gave him her hand, it was very cold. "Good-bye," she said, and could say no more; she dared not look at him.

He dropped her hand, and she heard him striding away; then a sudden horror of what her life would lose when he was gone came over her, and in an instant, forgetting pride, she cried out,—

"Come back, come back; I cannot let you go."

He turned, he sprang to her, caught her in his arms, his breath coming deep and fast.

"My love, my love! Thank Heaven! my own at last."

She looked into his face with shining eyes, "Dear, I have rest and peace now."

[THE END.]

A HUMAN body in a remarkably good state of preservation has recently been found at Pompeii; it is that of a man who was probably struck while in flight at the time of the destruction of the city. The features are well defined, the hands are perfect, and one is supposed to have held two keys, which were found close to it.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

—O—

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN HIS POWER!

THE carriage sped on through the cold, grey day, and Lady Valerie, in her wild anxiety, never noticed whither it was taking her. They passed through a village now and then, where the labourers stood still in open-mouthed astonishment at the pace at which the black horses were going, but they did not halt till they drew up at the iron gates belonging to the private grounds of a white house.

Then one of the men got down and opened the gates, and they drove on, past clumps of evergreens whose leaves were shining with the dampness of the atmosphere, to a front door, which seemed to loom suddenly out of the growing mist.

Evidently they were expected, because the door was thrown open before anyone had time to ring, and a solemn-looking butler came down the steps to assist Lady Valerie to alight. Even in her preoccupied state of mind she noticed that this did not look like an inn, but she only supposed that Miss Springgold had been mistaken.

"Allow me," said the servant, as she fumbled nervously with the handle of the carriage-door.

"Where is my father?" she asked, hoarsely, her heart beating so fast that she could scarcely speak.

"In the drawing-room, miss. Will you step into the library for a minute?" and he threw open a door on the right of the hall.

She had kept up so bravely, but now the moment was near when she was to see him, and she did not know how terribly changed he might be. A sickening fear came over her, and she dropped down on a sofa because she had not the strength to stand.

Presently the door opened; her heart seemed to beat, with two loud hammers in her ears. Fancy, if the face she loved were horribly disfigured; and in a moment she pictured it grey and ghastly, with blood pouring from a gash on the forehead! There was a step on the carpet, and she looked up to see Colonel Darrell coming towards her in hunting-dress, black coat, and white cords, with splashes of mud on his high-boots. His dress, assumed for that especial purpose, told her where he had been. Therefore she was not surprised—perhaps he had been nearest the Earl when he fell, and so had picked him up and brought him to a stranger's house.

He took her hands in his and looked down into her face, his own white with excessive, but suppressed excitement, and a wave of compassion swept over his heart. It went against him to think it was through him that she had been so terribly frightened, but surely the end justified the means.

"Take me to him," she breathed faintly, and he saw how she trembled.

"Not till you are more composed. Wait a moment."

"No, I must see him at once!" her eyes still with that startled look of terror, not for herself, but for her dying father.

"He is not so bad as we feared," he said, soothingly, afraid that his confederate had gone too far, and that he would gain no power over her as long as she was entirely engrossed by the one idea. Somehow, in spite of his reckless determination to win her against her own will, he was not cruel by nature, and it touched him to see how she had forgotten all fear for herself in her anxiety for her father. "Indeed, his injuries are much slighter than we thought," watching her intently as he spoke.

She drew a deep breath, and the tears rushed into her eyes.

"Thank Heaven!"

He smiled tenderly, and led her back to the sofa.

"Sit down. When your nerves are more composed I will take you to him."

He knew that every moment was of value to him, and he had to exert his whole powers of self-restraint to hide the wild impatience which was consuming him, but at the same time he knew as well that over-haste would ruin all.

Keeping himself in check, as he had often done the spirit of his own favourite horse. Kismet, he talked to her gravely, sitting at a little distance from her, detailing the circumstances of the accident, till by-and-by the fit of trembling was over, and she looked up at him and said with truth,—

"I am quite calm now."

"I am a bit of a doctor. Would you allow me to feel your pulse?"

She held out her hand with ready obedience, and he put his fingers on her soft white wrist.

"Gallop as if to win a race," he said, with a smile; "but steadier than it was. I will go and see what the doctor says."

He went out of the room quickly, and going into the drawing-room rang a bell.

"Why is Mr. Porter not here?" he asked, as soon as the butler appeared in answer.

"He sent to say that he could not be here for three hours, sir, as he had to go to a funeral at a distance."

"Three hours!" his face blank with utter dismay as he muttered an awful oath.

Then he recalled his self-control with an effort, and after a few minutes of anxious thought, told the butler to bring him a decanter of port and two wine-glasses.

As soon as the order was obeyed and the servant gone Colonel Darrell took a small packet out of his pocket, poured some wine into one of the glasses, and shook some white powder into it, carefully measuring the quantity with his eye.

Then he stirred it with his penknife till the powder was entirely absorbed in the wine, held it up to the light to be quite sure that there was nothing to make it look different to an ordinary glass of port, and being satisfied with the result took it into the library.

Lady Valerie looked up at him with eager eyes.

"Did you think I was never coming?" with a smile.

It pleased him to see anything but aversion in her eyes, although he knew that the engagement was not for him.

"The Earl is marvellously better; but the doctor is afraid of any agitation, and he insists upon your drinking this before he will allow you to see him."

"But I may go directly I have?"

"Do you think that any one could wish to keep you away?"

"No, why should they?"

He put the glass into her hand, and she could not guess how the mere contact with the slender fingers made the blood boil in his veins.

She drank it off in feverish haste, thinking the sooner it was swallowed the sooner she would get to her father, and then she sprang to her feet.

"Now," she said, "I am ready."

"Yes," he said slowly, as he watched her, "the Earl will be delighted to see you."

She took a few steps forward and then stopped, stretching out her hands as if to feel for something to catch hold of. What was this dumbness which made her totter like a baby?

The floor seemed as if it were waving up and down like the waves of the sea, and the writing-table in the middle of the room seemed to rise up to meet her. A weight came over her eyes, and pressed the lids close down till the long lashes rested on her cheeks, and with a sigh of utter helplessness she fell into the arms which were but too willing to receive her.

A gleam of exquisite tenderness lit up Colonel Darrell's usually stern face as he lifted her gently on to the sofa, and knelt down beside her. Was there ever such loveliness before? And all this would be his own

when four hours were over, if only his secret was kept till all was finished.

It was almost enough to turn his brain; the sudden sense of possession after a year and a half of impotent longing.

It had all been planned with the most prudent foresight, which had foreseen everything, and provided against accident. He had fixed on the day of the meet at Bolton as one on which Marie de Ravigny was sure to go out hunting, and Lady Valerie to stay at home.

There was a delicacy and reserve in her nature which would make her not anxious to exhibit herself in public so shortly before her wedding; but the pretty Austrian would not like to disappoint the Marquis, and endanger the coronet which seemed to be waiting for her.

Rex Verreker had gone up to town, as he thought Darrell was safe in London; the Earl was riding somewhere across country with Daintree and most of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. There would be nothing suspicious in the arrival of Miss Springgold, and there was anything like a run the Earl would not appear in person to give the lie to her tale till late in the afternoon. Probably some time would be lost in making up their minds what to do; then somebody would ride over to Scaresdale to find out the meaning of the mystery, whilst the others waited till the messenger came back.

Firtree-lane was the only direction that Flossie could give, for he had carefully concealed Valerie's final destination, and when they reached the lane they would be hopelessly puzzled.

Hours must elapse before they could get on the right track, and by that time he would be quite ready to receive the Earl and as many of them as liked to come.

A smile of confident triumph was on his face as he rose up from his knees to stir the fire. In answer to his vigorous poke a brilliant blaze lighted up the room, and brought its old-fashioned furniture into full relief.

It would have been a comfortable room but for the desolate look of the empty bookcases, and the absence of all ornaments except one vase containing red and white carnations on the writing-table.

The mantelpiece was quite bare, and the whole effect was that of a furnished house hurriedly let to a new occupant who had not as yet had time to settle down in it, which was the case.

The former owner had left England suddenly to take an appointment in India, and his solicitors had been glad to let the house to Colonel Darrell for a month whilst on the look-out for another tenant.

Along with Valerie de Montfort!—he could scarcely believe it. She would be his in spite of Rex Verreker—his to love, to cherish, to care for; her beauty would be his to deck as he chose with the stores of jewels he had collected during his travels in the East; and scorn him as she might at first in passionate resentment, she would come back to him in tender submission, with her dark eyes full of love, kisses trembling on her lips, for there was not a woman who could resist him if he chose to make his power felt.

Again and again he went up to the sofa where she lay, and thought that he had never seen her look so deliciously lovely before. The tight-fitting sealskin set off the fairness of her soft, white skin, and the curves of her slight, but well-rounded figure. The fur toque had fallen off, and a few soft curls were straying over the whiteness of her low forehead. There were dark circles round her eyes, and her long lashes looked almost black.

He stooped his head with the passionate longing to touch those lips with his, but the instincts of a gentleman made him draw back, awed by a girl's sweet innocence.

There would be time enough in the future, when she would be content to offer what he was honourable enough not to steal without

her knowledge. He prided himself upon this proof of his self-restraint, but he seemed to forget that to steal a kiss was a small injury compared to stealing herself, as he was doing now.

Time crawled on, the room grew dark, he went to the windows and closed the shutters, then rang the bell for candles, which he took from the butler's hand, and placed on the mantelpiece.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, sir. The lady and gentleman are in the drawing-room waiting, and I have lighted the chandelier, as well as the candelabras against the wall."

"Then put them out at once. The less light the better. Two candles on the centre table will be sufficient. No sign of Mr. Porter yet?"

"No, sir, I will let you know the moment he arrives."

"Keep the front door bolted, and tell Sleeman to come to me."

"He's not here, sir. I thought you had sent him out."

Colonel Darrell frowned.

"Send him to me directly he comes in."

Turning away he muttered to himself,—

"What the deuce does the fellow mean by taking himself off just when I want him most! I shall get rid of him as soon as I can, for Valerie won't be able to bear the sight of him."

CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE SPELL.

It would be impossible to say how often Colonel Darrell looked at his watch during the course of that afternoon; but the longest day must have an end, and before the end there came the sound of wheels outside, and a knock at the front door.

Colonel Darrell hurried from the room to intercept the butler before he could open it.

"Look out of the window first, you block-head," he said, angrily, and the servant ran into an adjoining room to reconnoitre.

"It's the parson, sir."

"All right, let him in; take him into the drawing-room, and tell him I will come at once."

"Now for it," he said to himself as he drew a deep breath, and stood over the sofa, where Valerie was still lying in a state of happy unconsciousness. There was not an instant to lose; the game was in his hands to lose or win! Now that the supreme moment had come, his confidence almost failed him. What if he had over-rated his powers, and the spell would not work!

But he would not allow himself time to think. He roused her as fast as he could with the strongest smelling salts, and held a cup of black coffee, which he had kept down by the fire for half the afternoon, to her lips as soon as they were able to part.

She drank it, and then her feet dropped down to the ground; she rubbed her eyes, and sat up.

Before she had time to ask a question or to make a remark, he said,—

"Your father is waiting for you."

"And you have let me sleep here! Why, how late it is!" looking round with wondering eyes at the closed shutters and lighted candles. "It was daylight when I came. What will papa think of me?"

"I told him that you had fainted."

"I must go to him at once," and she attempted to rise.

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You must wait an instant."

"Excuse me, I have waited too long already!" drawing herself away from his touch, as if she now for the first time remembered her aversion to him.

He saw it, and folded his arms across his hairy chest, looking down at her with a dangerous tenderness in his eyes.

But he had himself well in hand, and his manner was cold and deferential.

"Listen! Lady Valerie!" he said, gravely. "Your father is suffering from a blow on the head, and the slightest excitement is sure to bring on concussion of the brain! Your nerves are all upset! Your heart is beating at fever-rate! You are in no state to go into a patient's room!"

"But I must!" restrained from springing to her feet because he was standing straight in front of her.

"Yield yourself to me, and you shall. Place yourself in my hands, and your nerves shall be calmed in five minutes!"

A cold jumped out of the grate, and the tension of his own nerves was so great that he started as if he had been shot.

It was hard to keep his head clear, and appear cool and collected—ready to seize upon every chance that offered—when his ears were strained to catch every sound outside.

"I know I have a power," he added, significantly; and he saw the shudder that came over her.

"I am afraid!—but I will be calm—indeed I will!" clasping her hands, tightly.

"You would break down, and do a world of mischief at the first sight of him! What are you afraid of? Your father is within call. Your father's room is just the other side of the passage. They have commented that I should try my method, as chloroform and salvolatile have failed; and what motive could I have but your own good?"

His voice was low and steady, though his heart was beating with impatience, because he knew that this delay might be fatal.

"Try," she said, seeing that there was no other way of gaining her own end.

And, after all, there was nothing to fear, when the others were in the next room, ready to come at the first call.

If they had sent him they would only wait a little while before they came to see after her, as they all mistrusted him as much as she did.

A gleam shot from his eyes; but he still controlled himself by the force of his iron will.

"Look at me!" he said, and she raised her eyes to his, and kept them there fixed on his glowing pupils by a power which she could not resist.

"I am your master-spirit," he said, in a low, impressive voice. "I know every secret of your heart, and if I choose I can compel you to confess them by word of mouth. Your will is mine, and subject to mine!"

He lifted his hands as he spoke with something shining brightly between them, whilst he concentrated all the strength of his will on the girl before him.

"I can make you hope what I hope, wish what I wish, live as long as I may live, and die when I die! Now sleep!" lowering his hands.

And as he lowered them her eyelids fell. He drew a deep breath; his power had not failed him; his will, working first on her imagination, controlled her nerves, and made her senses subjugate.

"Stand!" he said, and she rose obediently, but like a person in a dream.

"Now, answer when I speak to you. Say, 'I will!'"

He bent his head, and fixed his eyes upon her wavering form and drooping neck.

"I will!"

It was only a whisper, but he missed his head, and almost gave a shout of triumph. The last test had been tried, and it had succeeded. The moisture stood on his forehead, for the happiness of his life depended on it.

A thrill of exquisite delight ran through his pulses, as he felt that he could do with her as he liked; that she was entirely in his hands for better or for worse, even before those fatal words were said.

He drew her passive hand through his arm, and led her out of the library, down the hall, and into the drawing-room, and as he went he looked right and left for the slouching form of

Zebedee Sleeman, but he was nowhere to be seen.

A slight frown puckered his forehead, but, after all, it did not matter much, only in case of an emergency he liked to have his ready tool at hand.

The drawing-room was a large room furnished with old-fashioned yellow damask, and ebony chairs and cabinets. It was dimly lighted by two candles in tall silver candlesticks, shaped like Corinthian pillars, and placed on a table covered with a crimson cloth. On the right side of the table stood a clergyman in a white surplice, with a prayer-book in his hand, and just behind him was a smaller table, with papers, pens, and a travelling inkstand. On the left side were two people, whom Colonel Darrell vaguely introduced with a wave of his hand, as the aunt and uncle of the bride.

The Rev. James Porter, temporary substitute for the absent rector, looked nervously from one to the other. There was something so strange and inexplicable in the component parts of this wedding party—the lovely girl standing before him with closed eyes, as if she were more than half asleep—the aristocratic bridegroom, with the pale, determined face and disordered dress; the silent lady and gentleman sitting the part of witnesses, but looking as if their usual sphere was the housekeeper's room or the pantry.

"I hope there is nothing irregular?" he began, in a hesitating voice.

"Nothing at all. Here is the special license," drawing it out of his pocket, "and everything has been done according to law. Pray, proceed!" his tone bespeaking the exasperated impatience from which he was suffering.

"The lady is of age?" with a questioning look at the drooping face, which looked so ineffably young and innocent.

"Ask her own aunt."

"Yes, sir," came from under the folds of an unusually thick lace veil.

Then Colonel Darrell stepped forward, and said in a low voice—

"This lady is blind, and more than half deaf. The ceremony is therefore very trying to her, and with your permission we will leave out all that is not absolutely necessary."

Added to his fear of interruption was the other fear that his influence might be waning, and that she would either be roused completely before the "I will" was said, or else, at least, not answer when the question was asked. Half mad at any delay, he bit his lip till the blood came, whilst maintaining a calm demeanour.

"Blind and deaf! poor young thing!" thought Mr. Porter, compassionately. "I hope this fierce-looking man will know how to take proper care of her!"

Then he bowed his assent, and opened his book once again. He had still an instinctive misgiving that all was not right, but he had no excuse for refusing to perform the service. A special license exempts either bride or bridegroom from the necessity of staying in the parish for a certain period before the marriage, so there were no questions to be asked on that score, and there was something about Colonel Darrell's manner which showed that he would not submit patiently to idle interrogatories.

The lady and gentleman took up their position behind the bridal pair, the clergyman cleared his throat, the marriage service began.

There was not a sound in the room but Mr. Porter's voice. Colonel Darrell stood rigid as a statue, his hands clenched tight, his eyes fixed on Lady Valerie in breathless suspense.

The first exhortation was left out to save time; at the end of the second a slight quiver passed over the bride's passive face, but her eyes remained closed.

Colonel Darrell, watching her closely, feared that she would be roused before the end. He said his "I will" hastily, almost tripping up the solemn words as they fell from Mr. Porter's

lips, and then bending down, whispered in her ear,—

"Say, 'I will!'"

The clergyman was waiting. There was a breathless pause. The two strangers leant forward.

"Say 'I will!'" repeated Darrell, hoarse with emotion.

The pale lips moved—a gleam of triumph shot from his eyes; only a few minutes more she would be his wife, and "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." His heart beat so loud that he could scarcely hear any other sound.

"Say 'I will!'"

"I—I——"(the pale face grew paler still; the eyelids twitched)—"I—w——"

One minute more, and the vow would have been made; but at that supreme moment there was a rush of footsteps along the passage, and the door was burst violently open.

Rex Verreker looked wildly from one to the other, as if scarcely crediting the scene before him; then sprang forward, and laid his hand on the bride's shoulder.

"I forbid this marriage!" he said, in a voice of thunder.

"By what right?" stammered Mr. Porter, letting his book fall down on the ground.

"The right of an affianced husband!"

"Stop at your peril!" said Colonel Darrell, sternly, his face white as death. "This lady is half married to me—by her own free will and consent!"

Lord Marshall had come in unperceived, and Zebedee Sleeman was crouching outside the door.

"Valerie, speak!"

A shudder passed through her frame; then, to the clergyman's intense amazement, she opened her eyes wide, and stretching out her hands to her lover said, entreatingly,—

"Take me to my father!"

Colonel Darrell covered his face with his hands. All was over. Verreker's voice had broken the mesmeric spell; and, as if conscious that their services were no longer required, his two witnesses crept out of the room.

CHAPTER LI.

BETRAYED AND DEFEATED.

"You have come too late," said Colonel Darrell, recovering himself with an effort, "and I defy you to prove any legal right to interfere! You are neither parent nor guardian; and this gentleman," with a glance at Mr. Porter, "is bound by my license to continue the service!"

"Then he will continue it without a bride!" said Rex, scornfully, as Valerie clung to his arm. "You must be mad to think I would give her up!"

"You cannot take Lady Valerie Darrell as your wife," with a cold sneer; "and the Earl would prefer me as a son-in-law to the loss of his daughter's reputation!"

Rex turned white with a terrible fear, and looked at the clergyman with questioning eyes.

"The marriage service was only just begun," said Mr. Porter, firmly. "There was no change of name as yet; and if you assure me that there has been fraud I can refuse to proceed."

"Your own eyes can tell you that there was no compulsion!" said Colonel Darrell, hotly. "You saw her come into the room, and I defy you to say it was not of her own free will!"

"She seemed to me to have little consciousness of what was going on, but that I thought was natural, considering her infirmities."

"I don't know what you mean by my infirmities!" said Valerie, her voice trembling with agitation. "And I don't know what you are doing here; but all I want is to be taken to my father. They say he is ill, and they won't let me see him!"

"There has been some trick!" exclaimed Mr. Porter, shutting up his book in some excitement; "and till all is explained I refuse to proceed!"



[A GLEAM OF EXQUISITE TENDERNESS LIT UP COLONEL DARRELL'S USUALLY STERN FACE AS HE KNELT DOWN BESIDE HER.]

"Are you aware that I can report you to the bishop? My license is correct, and that is all that concerns you. Lady Valerie, listen!" standing straight in front of her. "You cannot go back to the world half-married—your only chance is to throw in your lot with mine, and on my honour, I will be a good husband to you."

For a moment all the sternness went out of his face, and his voice was soft as a woman's.

The others waited in silence for her answer. "Half-married! I don't understand—there is some mistake," still holding tight to Verreker's arm, though she raised her troubled eyes to Darrell's for an instant.

"Never mind, it is all a fraud—come away," said Rex, impatiently, anxious to put several miles between her and the odious man who had carried her off.

"But I want to understand."

"Your father is well—his illness was only a subterfuge to bring you here."

"Hear him!" cried Verreker, his eyes blazing.

"My father well!" a joyous light shining in hers.

"Yes, it was a fraud. I confess it, but it answered, and you came. Since two o'clock you have been in my house—it is now just seven," a peculiar smile played round his lips; "don't you think after that it would be as well to go on with the marriage service?"

Verreker started forward with clenched fist, but Lord Marshall held him back.

"Wait, and don't spoil her innocence!"

"Go on! Thank Heaven it was never begun. You know that in the past I always hated you; and now that you have deceived me by the cruellest of lies, I pray Heaven that I may never see your face again! Take me away, Rex," her voice faltering; "to be in his house nearly stifles me."

"I will," and he began to lead her to the door. "Stop," cried Colonel Darrell, his chest heaving, his eyes flashing, "if you go from me now your character is lost for ever!"

"After that," said Lord Marshall, stepping forward, "I will spare you no longer. Unless you take immediate steps for your own safety you will be arrested for the murder of Valentina Marini."

Colonel Darrell recoiled, his face ghastly.

"So you have betrayed your friend!" he said, slowly.

"You are no longer my friend," drawing himself up with unaccustomed dignity. "You have placed yourself beyond the pale of gentlemen by your dastardly conduct to that girl."

"I have never harmed her—I have treated her with scrupulous reverence, on my word of honour!"

"I knew it!" with contemptuous abruptness. "Now Verreker, the sooner we depart the better."

"I—I can't let him go like this," muttered Rex between his teeth.

"Perhaps you would like Lady Valerie to look on whilst you thrashed him?" in a sarcastic undertone. "Place her in the dog-cart, and let us be gone. The sooner she is out of this the better."

"You are right," and without another look at his enemy he led her from the room.

Colonel Darrell followed her with his eyes, his face twitching convulsively. After all he had lost her, and the long blank future lay stretched out before him to be spent without her. He stood as if rooted to the ground, like one of the elms outside, and never noticed how Lord Marshall, after one glance in his direction, followed his friends, nor how the clergyman divested himself of his clerical attire, and after packing it up in his bag, hurried from the room, as if glad to breathe a purer atmosphere.

Colonel Darrell found himself alone—everyone had deserted him. The housekeeper and butler whom he had bribed to act the part of uncle and aunt to Lady Valerie, in order to rob it of the appearance of a runaway match, had stolen away at the first alarm, satisfied with the price they had been paid, and anxious

to escape all evil consequences. The friend who had stuck by him through good report and bad had been willing to betray him to the scaffold for the sake of a girl who ought to have been nothing to him; and the girl herself, for whom he would have bartered his soul, had left him in scorn and hatred.

There was only one man left who would cling to him in the darkest hour—a fellow whom he had despised and snubbed, and abused, but who was always as ready to treat him with servile affection as a beaten spaniel.

He went to the door and called "Zebodee!" in a voice that resounded through the empty corridors, again and yet again, but no answer came. He rang the bell violently, and presently the butler answered it, his countenance disturbed and perplexed.

"Send Sleeman to me at once!"

"I don't think he can be in the house, or he must have heard you, sir. Yet Mary, the housemaid, declares she saw him come in with the others."

"With whom?" his face darkening.

"With the two gentlemen who drove up to the back door about half-an-hour ago. She thought they were special friends of yours, sir, as Sleeman was with them!"

Colonel Darrell said nothing, but as soon as the servant had withdrawn paced up and down the room in violent agitation.

"Betrayed by Sleeman! And I would have staked my life on his fidelity!" he muttered gloomily.

And in the darkest, farthest-off corner of the house crouched the hunchback, trying to excuse his treachery to his master, trying to console himself with the thought of his revenge.

"It was for Afra's sake, for Afra's. He might ha' trampled me under foot, and I would never have turned against him, but he took my pet from me, and I've taken his from him! And to-morrow I'll die for him if it'll do him a ha'porth of good!"

(To be continued.)



["ANGRY? IS THAT ALL A WOMAN TREATED AS I HAVE BEEN WOULD FEEL?"]

ROYALTY.]

DOWN STREAM.

CHAPTER I.

"RUBY!"

"Yes, papa."

"Your aunt will arrive here to-day; this letter is from her. I am glad you will not be left alone during my absence."

"Yes," I said again, chiefly because I did not know what else to say, and looked straight at him across the breakfast-table; but he, absorbed in his letter, made no further remark, so I was left to my thoughts, which were anything save pleasant, that bright summer morning.

Outside the birds sang gaily; the trees waved in the gentle breeze, and rustled their boughs as though proud of their green bravery; the flowers lifted their heads in the sunshine, and all creation seemed to rejoice in the glorious June weather.

Yet there was no joy, no happiness in my heart, though at eighteen girls as a rule have few troubles. However, for two years I had been sorely troubled and worried.

My mother died when I was five years old, partly from chagrin at my father losing his fortune, speculating. He tried hard to make up to her the difference, but she drooped and pined for the luxuries and comforts she had been accustomed to.

He worked unceasingly at his profession—that of a barrister; but when this misfortune occurred he was fifty, and it is hard for a man of that age to turn back and begin at the foot of the ladder. Besides, for ten years he had hardly practised at all, having made a large fortune, and so had lost his connection.

He found the struggle terribly severe, and embittered by seeing the wife he idolised fading away before his eyes, and he powerless to keep beside him this well-loved companion. When the end came my aunt, Mrs. Ellis,

hastened to England to relieve my father of the onerous charge of a young child.

He was loath to part with me, still knowing it was for the best he consented, and so I returned to Italy with Aunt Ella, and spent fourteen years of my existence abroad in a happy Bohemian sort of life, wandering from place to place; now wintering at Rome, now spending a few months in sunny Florence, and then straying on to Nice.

My aunt was a widow, childless and comfortably off; she was therefore well pleased to have me with her. Yet, though I was fond of her, I found she was not sympathetic; she failed to understand my nature and I hers. She had not the faintest idea how to manage a young girl—at one moment she would be stern and severe, the next indulgent to a degree.

Her régime was altogether so uncommon that I grew up rather wild and somewhat careless of *les convenances*. It is hard for a child to know what is right and what wrong.

I was left too much to my own devices, without any tender guiding hand to point out the shoals and quicksands I ought to have avoided; but notwithstanding Aunt's peculiarities, those were happy days I spent with her wandering under alien skies.

The happiest times were when my father joined us. He always came twice a year, sometimes oftener, when he could get away from his business, at which he worked very hard, allowing himself little leisure, trying to retrieve his fallen fortunes.

He spared no expense on my education; it must have been a terrible drain on his slender resources. Childlike, however, I had no idea of the value of money, and while learning music, singing, painting, and languages from the best masters Italy could produce, never dreamt that he was denying himself even common necessities in order that his only child might be accomplished.

I think he was satisfied in the end. I spoke

Italian, French, and German as fluently as I did English, and played and sang fairly well.

This queer Bohemian sort of life went on until I was sixteen, and then my father wrote to say he had made sufficient to enable him to have me with him in England, and that he would come to fetch me the following Christmas.

The idea of being with so dear and indulgent a parent gave me unqualified delight, and I longed for December to arrive. It came at last, bringing him in due course; and before I had thoroughly realised it we had left sunny Italy, with its fragrant orange groves, its blue skies, and balmy breezes, and were domiciled in London.

He had taken rooms in a narrow, dingy street near the Temple, where he had chambers. Town in January to a girl who had spent twelve years in glowing southern lands! I shuddered at the change, and missing the cerulean skies, the golden warmth, and general freedom of life there, began to pine and droop.

My father's loving eyes soon detected the alteration in my appearance, and at last I was obliged to own that I could not live in dull, sunless London.

He was in despair at first, thinking I was going to die there and then on the spot; but two or three doctors having opined that all I wanted was country air and plenty of exercise, he immediately left town, and seeing a charming little cottage on the banks of the Thames near Chiswick took it, and thither we went early in April.

I was delighted with this miniature mansion, with its green porch covered with thick clustering roses and honeysuckle, its trim velvety lawn sloping right down to the river, its tiny, cosy rooms, and general aspect of homely brightness.

I had been been ordered to row, so we bought a light skiff, in which I went for a pull every day, occasionally two or three times a day, so fond was I of being on the water, accom-

panied, as a rule, only by my bulldog Nora, an animal of a singularly ferocious aspect, but mild and affectionate, possessed of a ridiculous snub nose and a particularly black-looking muzzle, which contrasted oddly with her white body.

I delighted in petting and teasing her. She was a splendid water dog, strangely enough, would swim after the boat for miles, and I should have been lonely, indeed, without my canine pet and companion.

At first my father was rather horrified at the cool un-English way in which I went about by myself, but after awhile he got used to it; it was no good, he found, being anything else, as he left for town early in the morning, and seldom returned before seven or eight in the evening. We only kept two servants, an old man and his wife. She presided over the house and Penates in the kitchen, and managed affairs generally; he dug and dived in the garden, saw to my boat, made himself useful in many ways, and sometimes clothed his image body in a fearful and wonderful blue coat, decorated with brass buttons, which had all the appearance of having been designed by Bash's own tailor, and then purposely arrayed would appear at dinner and wait on us. As, however, he usually managed to drop the potatoes into my lap, spill the gravy over his master's head, and break a few glasses and plates, all of which unique performances were backed by a running accompaniment of choky grunts and half-suppressed "Oh, lars," we preferred disposing with his assistance, and waiting on ourselves.

For four or five months my life glided on in perfect, contented happiness in this rural retreat, and then—*one morning in the August following my arrival in England*—disorder disturbed my peace, and feverish unrest took possession of my soul. I remember it well. It was the Sunday after the day on which I reached the age of seventeen; we had finished breakfast, and papa called me into the library, where he was seated in state like a magistrate.

"Do you remember the Drummonds at Devedale, Ruby?" he began, without any preamble.

"Yes, papa," I replied, promptly. "I had only a vague, misty memory of a tall, fair boy playing with me at our old home. Twelve years is a long time to look back, and children so soon forget, but I was rather, not to say, very curious to know what was coming, especially as I knew he had that morning received a bulky letter, part of which he held in his hand, so I had no intention of entering into details, and acknowledging that I remembered very little about them."

"You know, of course," he continued, "that Wilberforce Drummond and I were very intimate friends, like brothers—our affection for one another unbounded?"

"Yes," I replied again. "This time more truthfully, for he had often spoken to me about this great friendship."

"Well, when he was dying, we agreed that his son Basil should marry you, and that the subject should not be broached to you until you reached the age of seventeen."

I made no answer to this astounding piece of news, but remained staring at my father, with widely distended eyes.

"The advantages were all on your side then," he went on quietly, not taking the smallest notice of my dismay and astonishment. "You were heiress to sixty thousand pounds, the Drummonds had only a few hundred a year; now Basil Drummond is Lord Devedale, with a rent-roll of thousands, and—"

But here I broke in, unable to control my anguish at the prospect of having to marry a lord, with—

"Why, why, papa, did you engage me to a nobleman when you know how republican I am, and how much I hate titles?"

"My dear," he rejoined, "Basil had no title when this engagement was arranged, and was simply Mr. Drummond. He was left twenty thousand a-year by an eccentric old

godfather, on condition that he took his name. Four lives stood between him and the Devedale title, but the last, a little boy of five, son of the late lord, fell into the lake in the park three months ago, so Basil is now Lord Devedale with another ten thousand a-year, and you will be "my lady," he concluded, rather abruptly. Still regarding me at the same time with considerable satisfaction, a feeling I was far from sharing.

As soon as I could I escaped from the library, and instead of going to the quaint old church, as was my wont on Sunday mornings, retired to a small summer-house at the extreme end of the lawn, near the river, and sat there for several hours reflecting on "the lottery of my destiny," which—*barred me the right of voluntary choosing.*

Few women, I think, care to have their husbands chosen for them. English girls are always allowed so much freedom in the way of choosing partners for life, and I had been brought up so strongly, left so entirely to do what I pleased, that I rebelled fiercely against this arranged engagement, and determined to tell my father that I could not, and would not marry young Drummond. But somehow or other my courage always failed me when I spoke to him on the subject. He seemed so thoroughly contented and delighted at the prospect of my leaving the wife of his old friend's son, that I had not the heart to tell him decidedly that the idea of having my future settled in this fashion was revolting to me, and that I could not agree to it, but only brought forward paltry excuses, which he disposed of very quickly. Over I suggested,—

"Perhaps Basil would not care to marry me?"

But he had replied, that Basil loved his father too well, and was far too obedient and dutiful a son not to agree readily to what he knew was his father's earnest wish; and there was a ring in his voice, and a look in his eyes, which quelled my turbulent spirit, and I never again openly dared to rebel, but nursed my grief secretly, and ended by positively hating the name of Devedale.

When my father first broached the subject to me, he said Basil would be in England soon, and come to us. Yet days lengthened into weeks, weeks into months, and November had fairly set in before we heard from him; then he wrote to say he had been very ill, and was ordered to pass the winter in Italy. There he remained long after the winter was over, sending all sorts of excuses for not coming to us.

After awhile it began to dawn faintly on me that this promising young scion of nobility was quite as much averse to the marriage as I was, and the idea of being forced on a reluctant bridegroom added greatly to my unhappiness. His last excuse was the most extraordinary. Early in April we received a letter from him bearing an Australian postmark. He had, he wrote, been wrecked while yachting, and the steamer that picked him up went straight to Melbourne, so he had been obliged to go too; but he intended to return at once, and would be at Devedale early in August, where he hoped to meet us!

Papa was satisfied with this lame explanation—I was not. The knowledge that in two months I must meet this "laggard in love"—meet him, too, with smiles and fair words while hating him in my heart, weighed down my spirits, and made me find even the June sunshine an empty mockery.

Papa was leaving to go on circuit for some weeks. That bright summer morning a short time before he started, he said,—

"You will be ready to go to Devedale on the third? I shall not be back before, so have everything ready. You don't mind the marriage now? You are quite reconciled to it?" he added, eagerly, gazing at me steadfastly.

And I, looking at the careworn, lined face of the parent I loved so well, and thinking how he had toiled and slaved to make money in order that I might be fitly educated for the position he wished me to hold, had not the

courage to tell him of my reluctance and miserable misgivings—to crush this hope which had supported and encouraged him through many weary days of work and self-denial, so I hugged my silent sorrow closer, and, murmuring "Yes," sent him on his journey happy and contented.

CHAPTER II.

It was late in the day when aunt arrived. She strode in like a *Marschmutter*, carrying, as she invariably did when travelling, several brown paper parcels in one arm, and in the other *Fido*, an obese, wheezy member of a dog, possessed of a corpulent body and a more luscious of a head, altogether a most unduly subject, but greatly prized and tenderly cherished by my antique relative.

After having favoured me with a frosty pat on either cheek by way of a salute, she sat down, and began to direct herself of some of her multitudinous wraps. I watched with great interest. Though it was the middle of summer and intensely hot, aunt had at least three woollen shawls and two silk handkerchiefs over her ample bosom and shoulders. All this stuffing gave her rather a hockum appearance, which fetched Burgess tremendously. He being a little wimpy man, bearing a greater resemblance to a dilapidated, half-starved orang-outang than anything else, couldn't take his eyes off her, and kept coming back again and again to the room in which we were, on some pretext or other, to gaze once more on this Brobdingnagian stranger.

Her head was decorated with a bright pink bonnet, garnished with several large blue flowers. This extraordinary headgear fascinated me. Involuntarily my eyes travelled back to it, and aunt, mistaking my looks of astonishment for admiration, stooped so that I might get a better view of it, and exclaimed, in a loud and triumphant voice,—

"Thirty-five francs at the *Maison Dorée*. Isn't it lovely, my dear?"

"Yes, very lovely," I muttered, freely, and then suggested that we should adjourn and prepare for dinner.

On our return to the dining-room we found Burgess in attendance, arrayed in the blue coat.

"Very extraordinary person," observed Mrs. Ellis, on one occasion when he was out of the room.

"Yes," I assented, timidly; "but we can't afford to keep anyone better."

"Then I shouldn't keep a manservant at all," responded my candid relative, tartly, "if I couldn't have something better than that old fright to wait on me."

I did not reply to this remark, but occupied myself with reflections on the general ingratitude of mankind; for Burgess had evidently a great and sincere admiration for aunt's elephantine proportions.

Everything went on well until nearly the end of dinner. Burgess had not, for a wonder, made any of his horrible mistakes, and I was in hopes that all would pass off smoothly, when suddenly, seeing that aunt had nothing on her plate, he made a lunge at a dish of strawberries, and in doing so caught his sleeve in her cap, whisking it off with such violence that the "front" of Auburn curls she wore, which was a closely-guarded secret, slipped back, and disclosed the real state of affairs.

I hardly blamed him. Aunt always went in for too much top-hammer, and on this occasion her cap, or rather bonnet—for it partook more of the nature of the latter article than the former—was a perfect triumph of floriculture, and stood nearly a foot high!

With rage gleaming in her eyes she rose, and stalked out of the room; while I, seizing the unlucky cap, and favouring the delinquent with a withering glance, rushed after her, and tried to appease her just wrath.

But in vain. For the rest of the evening I heard nothing but animadversions on the unbecomingly of old people, which was slightly

amusing, as Burgess was at least ten years her junior.

The sun shining in at my window, with his bright golden beams, woke me early the next morning. Delightful for a row, I decided; and though it was only five o'clock I jumped out of bed, and dressing quickly hurried down, and out to the garden, where Nora, chained to her tub, greeted me with many cries and jerks.

Setting her free, I proceeded to the boat—jelly taking her usual place on a cushion in the stern—and seizing the sculls I pulled steadily up against stream, towards Richmond.

I had a great desire to get to Eelpie Island, notwithstanding the strong tide. I had several hours to do it in, as aunt never breakfasted until half-past nine or ten, so I could take it easy, which I did, thoroughly enjoying the cool, fresh breeze, which rendered the warm June day delightful, and listening to the rapturous song of the lark, thrilling far beyond the clouds.

The peaceful beauty of the early morning lulled me into a state of dreamy forgetfulness, and after a time my troubles seemed to float away on the glittering waters, and a delightful feeling of happy content came over me.

But at last, awaking to the fact that I was going backwards instead of forwards, I gave way vigorously, to make up for lost time, missed striking the water, and fell back, jerking the sculls out of my hands.

When I recovered my equilibrium I found I was careless in the middle of the river, floating "down stream," my sculls leading the way by about three boats' length.

It was not a pleasant predicament. I felt rather frightened at first, and looked round in dismay for assistance. There was not a creature to be seen anywhere.

So after a time, regarding my presence of mind, I took the stretcher, and tried by padding with it to keep my skiff a little straight. It was hard work; and, feeling anything but comfortable, I began to wish devoutly that I had not come out, when suddenly round a curve shot a light, outrigger boat, rowed by a young man in the orthodox white flannel.

As it neared I called loudly, and then, fearing he might pass without seeing me, waved the stretcher frantically.

"I beg your pardon!—what is it?" he asked, as he pulled alongside, an amused smile on his lips—I suppose at my flushed face and frantic gestures.

"My sculls!" I replied, eagerly. "Could you get them for me?"

And I pointed to where they were floating leisurely down.

"I will try," he answered, with a cheery laugh, rowing away hard in chase of the fugitives.

The bend of the river hid him from sight; and after a time, which appeared to me interminable, he returned in triumph with the sculls.

"I am afraid I have been a long time," he remarked, as he handed them to me; "but it is such risky work moving in these tight boats."

"Not at all," I replied, graciously. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Please don't try. I am only too happy to have been able to assist you. How did you manage it?" he added, after a moment, with a quizzical look in his dark blue eyes. "I suppose you were pulling too hard? It is rather rough work for a lady going up against stream."

"Yes," I assented; "I think that was it."

"Do you often come on the river?" he queried next.

"Yes, every day," I responded, eagerly, not wishing him to think me a cockney unaccustomed to boating.

"Do you live near?" he went on. "If you will allow me I will scull down with you, and see that you do not meet with any more accidents."

"Over there," I said, pointing Chiswick way.

As we pulled leisurely towards home I took the opportunity of studying his appearance. He was, as far as I could judge, above middle height, splendidly built, his broad shoulders and deep chest shown off to perfection in the tight-fitting jersey he wore.

His features were straight and clear cut, his hair fair, close-cropped at the back, but clustering in thick curls and rings over his forehead; a long tawny moustache drooped over his mouth, which, with his short hair and erect bearing, gave him a military look.

The chief charms of this handsome face were the expression and the eyes—deep blue eyes, clear, candid, and honest, that met mine steadily, and unflinchingly.

I felt quite sorry when we reached our miniature mansion, and saw Burgess waiting to help me ashore.

"I hope we shall meet again under happier circumstances," said my new acquaintance, with a smile and a bow, as he rowed away.

Aunt was not down, so I had time to arrange my rather dishevelled attire before she appeared. At breakfast she began a discussion on the relative merits of the Vansittarts and the Corris.

"Yes," she observed, with a disparaging look at my slender figure, "you certainly are like your mother's family. We Vansittarts," here she cast a complacent look over her ample proportions, "are all fine people."

Looking at her double chin, huge body, and general largeness, I offered up a silent thanksgiving that nature had been kind enough to cast me in the mould of the Corris, and not in that of the Vansittarts.

"At one time," she continued, "I thought you were going to be rather pretty, in a *petite* style; but now with that extreme pallor, and your hair cut short, you look like an ugly boy," and having announced this flattering fact, she rose from the table and went into the garden.

I was intensely disgusted at her speech, being rather proud of the tiny rings and curls of black hair that clustered all over my head, and far from thinking my pale face and brown eyes masculine-looking.

Then I fell to wondering if my acquaintance of the morning thought me ugly and boyish.

I did not tell aunt of my adventure. I know she would worry and lecture terribly about it, and perhaps forbid me to go on the river again until papa came back. So I held my peace, and kept my little secret to myself.

The next morning I longed to go for a pull, but maidenly prudence forbade it. If I were to meet the handsome stranger, I reflected, he would be sure to think I had come out to see him. Therefore, I remained at home.

After breakfast, as usual, we went out to the garden, and presently, coming slowly down, I saw my good-looking friend, his eyes fixed on our lawn.

The moment he saw me he smiled, and lifted his hat, both of which performances were luckily unobserved by aunt, who had her back to the river, and was occupied cutting creamy gloire de Dijons.

The following morning, to my excessive disappointment, was wet, and it was not until the third morning after my adventure that I was again on the river.

I had not gone very far when a boat shot out from under the willows, the occupant of which I recognised as my rescuer.

"I thought we should never meet again," he began, laughing pleasantly, and displaying a fine set of teeth. "Of course you weren't out yesterday?"

"No," I murmured, bashfully.

"I was," he continued, "but hardly hoped to see you. Are you going far this morning?"

"Not very far—to Kew or Richmond, I think."

"May I come with you?" he queried, eagerly.

I assented, and we pulled away steadily, in the course of a short time becoming extremely good friends. When returning, as we neared home he asked,—

"May I not know your name?"

"Oh, yes," I answered readily. "I am Ruby Vansittart."

"What!" he cried, with considerable astonishment.

"A funny name, isn't it?" I said, feeling for the first time in my life rather ashamed of my romantic cognomen.

"A very pretty one," he replied.

"And yours?" I asked.

"Dick Hetherington."

Then we said good-bye, and he rowed away.

CHAPTER III.

A MONTH passed—passed like a delicious dream.

For the first time I loved, loved devotedly, and there is really "nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream." I could not conceal the fact from myself that Dick Hetherington possessed my heart solely and wholly. Every morning I met him, and those meetings became a necessity, until at last I could not pass a single day without seeing him.

At first I struggled against my infatuation, and said I would not go on the river, but Dick begged hard for one more morning, and the imploring look in his blue eyes conquered me. I went not only once, but many times. He had never actually spoken of love to me, and yet I knew I was not indifferent to him; he showed such pleasure whenever we met, and pressed me so eagerly to meet him again and again.

The dream had been perfect, delicious, roseate; the waking was sombre indeed.

A letter came from my father, saying that in two days he would be with us, that everything must be ready for us to start for Devedale, as my intended husband would be at the Court, and would come over to my aunt's house the evening after our arrival.

The news fell on me like a crushing blow. In my new-found happiness I had nearly forgotten my engagement, only remembering it at times when I was alone, and comforting myself then with the reflection that something might occur to prevent my marriage.

But after reading the letter, I knew the terrible time had arrived when I must face my reluctant suitor, and that very little, or nothing, could happen in two days.

Two days! What a weary refrain my heart made of those words, and it was in a numbed, wretched sort of way that I set out on my usual morning excursion. Dick was waiting for me at Kew.

"What is the matter, little woman?" he asked tenderly, gazing with considerable astonishment at my white face and heavy eyes.

"Nothing, Dick," I replied, "at least, nothing that I can tell you about here."

"You are not well, Ruby. We will stop at Richmond and stroll through the park. You must not row much to-day."

Wearily I assented to this, and, landing, we went into the park.

It was a glorious July morning. The intense heat of the sun tempered by a cool, refreshing breeze, the blue cloudless sky, one vast azure curtain, the glowing summer air alive with the song of wild birds, warbling forth a flood of delicious melody; the soft dew sparkling in the morning sun, as it lay thickly on the green, velvety sward. Yet I was too wretched to be able to appreciate the beauties of nature.

"Now, what is it, darling?" queried Dick, drawing my hand through his arm.

"I am going away," I jerked out tearfully.

"Going away?" he repeated. "When?"

"To-morrow!"

"To-morrow, my love, my dearest?" he said, tenderly, drawing me close to him. "You

cannot, must not go, until I have told you how much I love you—until I have your sweet assurance that you will be my wife."

For a minute I yielded to his fond embrace, then drawing away I sobbed, "I cannot."

"Cannot? why, Ruby, why? I know you love me, it is useless to deny it. Your eyes betrayed you long ago."

"Answer," he continued, as I remained silent, "do you hate me?"

"No, Dick; a thousand times no," I sobbed, breaking down altogether, and hiding my face on his shoulder; "but I am engaged—going to be married to someone else."

"Going to be married! To whom? Tell me his name!"

"Lord Deevedale," I murmured, faintly. "Deevedale! And do you care for him?"

"No," I answered with considerable energy, in the midst of my tears. "I have never even seen him. I hate the sound of his name, and wish heartily that such a person did not exist."

"Rather rough on your future spouse," I heard him mutter. "Tell me all about it, pet," he said aloud, and so as we paced slowly over the springy turf I told him all my sorrow.

When I had finished he said,—

"You must not marry if you don't like him. Surely your father would not force you into an unwelcome marriage?"

"He must never know that I dislike it," I replied, drearily.

"You cannot, will not, sacrifice yourself, and me?" he added in a low tone.

"Oh! I cried, miserably, "don't tempt me. I must marry him."

"Perhaps you will like Deevedale when you see him."

"No, Dick, I never shall, never can care for anyone but you," and I looked up lovingly at the frank, handsome face I had learnt to love so dearly.

"Then I must leave you?"

"Yes," I moaned.

"Will nothing make you give up this sacrifice?" he queried, passionately.

"Nothing," I answered, hopelessly. "It would break my father's heart."

"Perhaps your intended won't care for you. Yet I am afraid there is very little chance of that; he is such an admirer of pretty women."

"Do you know him?" I asked with some astonishment.

"Yes, very well."

"And why didn't you tell me you knew him?" I demanded, rather indignantly.

"Well, darling, I wasn't aware that the subject would interest you, as this is the first time you have mentioned his name to me."

"Knowing this to be the fact, I remained silent for some minutes, and then asked what sort of a man my future husband was."

"Oh, like the general run of men," answered Dick.

"Is he agreeable?"

"Pretty well," replied my lover, somewhat reluctantly.

"Is he handsome?"

"Well," said my companion, with curious hesitation, "I am not a good judge of masculine beauty, and—and—tastes differ so much. I can tell you, though, who is charming, and that is your little self, pet," he added, clasping me suddenly in his arms, and kissing me fondly.

"You must not, Dick," I cried, upbraidingly, freeing myself from his embrace.

"I think you might let me have a last kiss," he said, reproachfully.

"I shall tell Deevedale he is the luckiest man I know, having such a dear little wife provided for him."

"Tell him! Why where will you see him?"

"He has often asked me down to his place, so I shall go now. It will give me a chance of seeing you again."

"You must not come down there, Dick," I cried, fearfully, pleased to think I should see him once more, yet knowing that it would

make it harder for me to do my father's bidding if I saw him often.

"I will only ask you to see me once, dearest," he pleaded. "The evening after you arrive meet me at the stile at the end of Deevely Wood. I will never ask you again if you don't wish it."

"I mustn't, I daren't do it, and it would be so dishonourable."

"Do love," he urged, "only this once."

"But Lord Deevedale—he may come with you," I expostulated, struggling feebly to resist the sad, pleading look in those dear eyes.

"There is no fear of that. He generally has a cigar in the library after dinner, and I swear it shall be the last time Dick Hetherington asks you to meet him."

And so I yielded, and promised to meet the man I loved near the house and in the woods of the man who was to be my husband, and whom I hated.

I was very silent as we rowed back. I was beginning to realise how overpowering was the love I bore Richard Hetherington, how empty, colourless, and dreary my life would be without him, and fiercely every feeling within me rebelled against my miserable fate. The gay flowers, the warbling of the joyous birds, the bright sunshine—what a mockery it all seemed.

"The summer's day" was indeed "a winter's night" to me, and it was with a pang of unutterable anguish that I watched him for the last time as he sculled away rapidly towards Putney. I staggered to the house. The door stood open, I passed in, went up to my own room, and flinging myself on the bed wept out my heart's agony the whole day through.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning my father returned, bringing with him Bessie Tremaine, an old playmate of mine. I was glad to see her. The mere sight of her round, apple-cheeked face did me good. She was a loving little thing, and would, I knew, be a sympathetic listener to all my woes and sorrows.

Her gay prattle enlivened the journey, and kept me from brooding over my misfortunes. As we were driving from Deevely station to aunt's house, through the lovely Devonshire scenery, we passed a magnificent place, with park-like grounds, long, shady avenues of oaks and elms, and herds of graceful deer.

"What a beautiful house!" exclaimed Bessie. "Who does it belong to?"

"That is Deevedale Court," replied my father, with great complacency. "Ruby's future home."

"Lucky girl!" she cried, "how I envy you."

"Do you?" I replied, indifferently, and fell to wondering if she would envy me if she knew the load of misery I bore, and what agony it was to me to appear cheerful before my father.

I determined the sacrifice should be complete, and that he should not guess my wretchedness.

The next morning it poured in torrents. A terrible dread seized me. I might not be able to go out that evening and meet my lover for the last time. I knew, only too well, how hard this last farewell would be, and yet nothing on earth would have induced me to forego this "sweet sorrow." The thought of seeing him again filled me with a rare joy, and I resolutely thrust aside all thoughts of the future, and revelled in the anticipation of once more looking into those frank blue eyes, that were dearer to me than aught else on earth!

Towards the afternoon, as Bess and I were discussing our tea in my own particular room, it cleared a little.

"I think you will be able to go to Deevely Wood," she observed.

"I hope so," I replied, drawing near the window, and looking out over the fair landscape, across the fields of waving golden grain,

to where the wood stood out—a patch of green leafage.

"And do you really love this man so well," she continued, linking her arm in mine, "that you would willingly give up a title and that beautiful place we passed yesterday to be his wife?"

"Willingly. Were it not for my father I shouldn't hesitate a moment in choosing between them. How I wish I could change places with you," I added, "and be free."

"I wish you could, I'm sure!" she cried, vivaciously. "I should like to be 'my lady,' and mistress of Deevedale Court. Besides they say he is very handsome."

"If he were Adonis himself," I replied, wrathfully, "it would make no difference to me. I hate him!"

"But you will have to be polite to him at the dance to-morrow night."

"Yes," I assented, wearily. "I wish, indeed, aunt had not asked all these people to witness my misery. It will be hard to play the part of a happy bride with an aching heart like mine."

"Poor Ruby," she said, kissing me, "I am so sorry for you. I must run away now, or I shall not be ready for dinner."

At the conclusion of that meal I rose abruptly from the table, and, passing through the hall, took a wrap from the stand, and proceeded to the place of meeting.

I hurried down the long drive, eager to reach the tryst. The rain had ceased entirely; it was a beautiful evening. The sun had sunk to rest behind a gorgeous mass of purple and gold clouds; the bright moon shone on the lovely, misty landscape, lighting up the blue sky, flecked here and there with tiny silver clouds, like a lamp. Sweet and refreshing were the odours floating up from the damp rain-swept earth, and there were few signs of the past gale.

As I reached the wood I saw Dick leaning on the stile waiting for me.

"You have come, then, darling?" he said as I neared him.

"Yes, Dick. Did you think I would not?"

"I wasn't certain, pet. I thought you might be unable to get out."

"Nothing would have stopped me," I replied. "This is 'our farewell.' I must never, never see you again. Oh! Dick," I added with a heavy sob I could not smother.

"My poor child," he murmured, clasping my hands with both his. Yet the stile was between us, and he made no attempt to get over and come nearer.

"Will nothing induce you to give up this marriage?"

"Nothing," I answered, firmly; but a great tear rolled down my cheek and fell on our clasped hands. "My father has promised me to Lord Deevedale, and I must marry him, even if I hated him ten times more than I do."

"Ruby," he said, after a pause, "I don't believe you really love or pity me."

"Oh! Dick, Dick," I cried, at these cruel words, wrenching my hands from his clasp, "you know I love you far, far better than anything else on earth," and covering my face I gave way to the choking sobs, that I could no longer suppress.

"Poor darling," he said, tenderly, "don't cry so."

"I wish I was dead, could forget and be forgotten," I rejoined, with inexpressible weariness.

"Will nothing I can say alter your decision. Nothing make you break this hateful bond?"

"Nothing; I am bound in honour to Lord Deevedale."

"I envy him. He will have a true brave little wife," then snatching me to him, he kissed me passionately, exclaiming, "Good-bye, my sweet, my love, I dare not stay, or I shall be cowardly enough to try and break your good resolutions;" and releasing me he strode away.

I stood for a moment—silent—in the starry gloom, then realising, with a terrible, agon-

sing pang, that he was leaving me for ever; that never again in all the long years that lay before me, should I see that beloved face, I stretched out my arms with an imploring gesture, and cried, "Dick, Dick, come back to me," but he did not turn his head, did not seem to hear me, and I was alone neath the starshine, overpowered with misery.

"You look lovely, Ruby."

"Do I, Bess?" I replied, indifferently. "It doesn't much matter how I look."

It was the evening of aunt's dance, I stood before the glass, in clouds of white satin and tulle, and could not help seeing, that in spite of my pale cheeks and heavy eyes, I looked pretty. I don't know how the hours passed, after I parted with my lover. I moved about in a dull stupefied sort of way, was heart-sick and wretched, and indifferent to everything. When aunt's maid told me my father was asking for me, I went downstairs calmly, knowing that at last the dreaded moment had arrived, when I must face the man who had made my life desolate.

I felt, however, relieved on entering the brilliantly lighted ball-room, to find they were not there. Hearing voices in the conservatory I went thither, feeling glad that this meeting would take place in that cool dim retreat. My cheeks could hardly grow whiter, yet I did not wish my father's keen eye on me, neath the full glare of the chandelier. He must know nothing of the anguish of my soul.

As I entered, he turned and said, "Lord Devedale, Ruby."

I put out my hand without lifting my eyes. "Will not my bride give me one glance from those bright orbs?" said a voice I knew only too well—and looking up, I found myself face to face with—my lover.

"What is the meaning of this, Dick?" I cried, despairingly.

"It means that I am Lord Devedale," he replied, "your intended husband."

It flashed across me like a ray of light—Richard Basil Drummond Hetherington—his godfather's name was Hetherington. Finding out who I was, he had concealed his identity to try me, to see if I were mercenary, ready to marry him for his wealth and title, for the good things of this world with which he could endow me, and a mighty wave of wrath surged over my heart, as I thought of what I had suffered on his account, the hours, days, weeks of agony I had endured, and from the pain and misery of which he might have saved me, had he not doubted and mistrusted me.

He made a step towards me, holding out his hands, a pleading look of longing in the deep blue orbs, and as our eyes met, and mine rested on the fair, debonaire face, which had been so inexpressibly dear to me, the old, mad passion for an instant resumed its sway over me, and I felt inclined to fling myself on his breast, and sob out my joy at discovering that my lover and my intended husband were one and the same person.

But pride forbade, and wounded love and vanity held me back, made me stand like a statue, with tightly clasped hands, dilated nostrils, and lowered lids. Wilfully blind to the pleading look, the outstretched arms, eager to enircle me in their warm embrace.

CHAPTER V.

"Ruby," he said, at last, after a painful silence, "have you no word of greeting for me?"

"None," I answered icily.

"Are you angry with me?"

"Angry!" I repeated, with a bitter laugh, that sounded strained and unnatural even to myself, "angry! Is that the right term to use? Is that all that a woman treated as I have been would feel? Angry! Good Heavens! have you any idea of what I have suffered—suffered simply that your pride and mistrust might be satisfied."

"Ruby," he ejaculated, "do you think I

would willingly cause you an instant's pain—willingly—"

"And have you not?" I cried, fiercely, interrupting him. "Have you not given me many instants, nay, hours of weary anguish? When I think of what I have gone through, and that you with a few words might have saved me all that sorrow, I feel—"

I stopped here, words failed me, but I began again,—

"Do you remember that day in Richmond Park, how coolly you listened to my miserable story, how unfeelingly you witnessed the agony you could have, and yet would not, relieve; and, worse than all, how you tempted me to be false to my engagement?"

"And will you be false to that engagement now?" he queried, in a low tone.

"Need you ask?" I returned, with cold contempt.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded my father, who had been regarding us silently in blank amazement.

"It means that Lord Devedale and I have met before, in fact, we are, or rather we were, excellent friends."

"When, where, how did you meet? This is extraordinary."

"You must ask his lordship for the explanation," I sneered, indicating him by a wave of the hand, "he, possibly, will be able to explain many things which are utterly incomprehensible to me; notably, how a man who professes to love a woman ardently, devotedly, with his whole heart and soul to the exclusion of every other object can deliberately and heedlessly inflict pain on her; also, why a nobleman, when he accidentally meets the girl to whom he has been betrothed since early childhood, and whom he has not seen for years, should think it necessary to drop his title and appear as plain Mr. Hetherington. Doubtless, his explanation will satisfy you. I hardly think it will me, as the man I knew as Dick Hetherington seems to me to be entirely different from Lord Devedale. Therefore, I will leave you to hear the story alone," and turning, I swept out of the conservatory with great dignity and head erect, yet feeling that a little more and I should burst into tears at this ending to my love dream—my summer idyl, that had been so sweet, so poetic, and now was over and done with for ever more.

"Ruby, come back. I insist upon your remaining here," called out my father, imperatively, but I swept on into the ballroom, for I saw aunt at the further end, welcoming the first arrivals, and I knew I was safe.

"You look very well to-night, child," she said, at last, when a slight lull in the steady flow of the incoming guests gave her time to take a look at me.

"Do you think so?" I said, nonchalantly, and feeling however much I might wish to return the compliment I could not truthfully do so, for her costume was simply hideous. It consisted of a voluminous apple-green silk, bedizened with her favourite flowers, pink roses, and flounces of white muslin. This antique garment was low-necked and short-sleeved, and revealed to disadvantage her elephantine throat and arms. Round the former was clasped a lovely pearl necklace, white as new-fallen snow, and which contrasted unfavourably with the highly-coloured skin, while over the latter were drawn a pair of yellow kids, at least a size too small, which had burst here and there, and disclosed the pinched flesh beneath. Her head was a mass of pearl pins, gigantic roses, and lace lappets, which flopped and fluttered at every movement, and her general appearance was extremely ludicrous, especially when she courtseyed to the county grandees, bending nearly to the ground, and recovering an upright position only after a desperate struggle, and many sways to and fro, and grabs at the Moorish scarf she wore over her shoulders, which showed a decided inclination to slip off, and reveal all the beauties it was intended to modestly hide.

"Yes," she continued, with an approving nod, that set all the lappets a-fluttering,

"you have a colour, and it's an improvement; shows up your eyes, you're too pale as a rule."

"Am I?"

"Of course you are; you look deathly sometimes."

"Well I don't to-night," I rejoined with a mirthless laugh, as I caught a glimpse of my face in a mirror opposite, and saw the angry red spot that burnt with feverish heat on either cheek.

"No. You are the prettiest girl in the room."

"Hardly that," I expostulated.

"Yes, you are," she declared obstinately, "there isn't any one here to come up to you, and I'm almost sorry you are engaged."

"Why?" I asked, looking up, and taking for the first time some interest in the conversation.

"Because Allan Archdale has been asking who you are."

"Oh!"

"Do you remember him?"

"I don't think so."

"You ought to; he used to bring you heaps of *pralines* and chocolates, not to speak of toys, that year we first wintered at Rome."

"I think I do remember him. He was tall and dark, with pointed nose and pointed beard, an excellent ready-made Mephistopheles."

"Hush! that's not a very flattering description of such a man."

"Why such a man? is he any different from his fellows?"

"In one way he is."

"And what is that one way?"

"Money."

"Ah! filthy lucre again," I ejaculated with such venom that Mrs. Ellis regarded me fixedly.

"His wealth is fabulous."

"Indeed," coldly.

"Yes. It can't concern you though, more's the pity, as you are not free."

How she harped on that string, and how I longed to tell her, that I considered I owed no allegiance to the man who had deceived me so cruelly. Yet I dare not, for she was a rare gossip, and the news would have spread about the room like wild fire, had she known it, and I was in no mood for pitying or curious glances, from the people who crowded the spacious rooms, and who for the most part were utter strangers to me.

"You have been very good helping me to receive my guests," she went on graciously, little knowing that I sheltered myself under the shadow of her wing to escape from my father and lover, "and now you must go and dance."

"Must—I—is—is it absolutely necessary that I should?" I faltered.

"Of course, my dear. I wonder Lord Devedale has not carried you off, ere this. What do you think of him? Of course you are satisfied, he is so handsome."

"Of course," I assented, looking at him as he stood talking to Beattie Tremaine, and noticing, not without a slight pang, how pale and set his face was.

"What is the matter with your father? He looks terribly cross; you had better go and ask him what is wrong."

"Oh, no!" I was beginning, when I heard a voice saying,—

"Mrs. Ellis, now you might redeem your promise and introduce me to your niece?"

"Certainly I will," she answered readily, performing the necessary introduction.

"May I have a dance, or am I too late?" asked Mr. Archdale, with a smile, and a glance straight down from his dark orbs into my upraised eyes.

"You are not too late," I answered, dropping my lids, for something in that glance made me shiver. "I am not engaged for any dances."

"Then I am in luck," he cried. "Give me this they are playing now, 'Sighs of the soul.' Is it not exquisite? And let me put my name down for two more."

Passively I handed him my programme, and then let him put his arm round my waist and whirl me the whole length of the long room.

When the valise was over he led me to the conservatory, and reluctantly I entered it, for the memory of the scene so recently enacted there was too painful for me to care to be there, yet I had no good reason to give for objecting, and let him find me a comfortable seat in a remote corner, shaded by a great overhanging palm.

"You don't remember me," he began, at once, pulling a chair close up to mine, and fixing his strange eyes on my face.

"I did not at first," I acknowledged, candidly. "When aunt spoke of Rome and the graces I remembered."

"The sweets, not me," he put in.

"Both," I declared.

"You would not have recalled the one save for the other?"

"Possibly," I returned, with a coolness that must have considerably astonished the millionaire, accustomed as he was to unlimited homage and attention from the fair ones of creation. "You see children are so fond of *bon-tous*," I added, not wishing to appear rude.

"Yes, I did not forget you."

"Really?"

"Really. I have often thought of you, and wondered if we should ever meet again."

"It is seldom a child makes such an impression."

"True. Still you were like someone I had known, and the likeness is more striking now. How old were you then?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Eight."

"And now?"

I thought this question rather cool, still answered,—

"Eighteen."

"Ten years!" he murmured, staring at me absently. "Ten years, and so like—so like."

I did not feel easy under this fixed gaze, and asked if he lived in the neighbourhood?

"Yes, Archdale Hall is my place—five miles from here. I hope you will come and see it. It is a sort of show-place—one of the sights of the county."

"I shall be pleased to," I answered, politely, feeling glad of anything that would be likely to interest me and divert my thoughts from the miserable break-down of my *affaires de cœur*.

"I will make up a party," he went on, with an eagerness that astonished me somewhat.

"You must all come over. There is a ruined chapel, believed to have been originally part of a monastery; and a tower, from the top of which can be seen a view that well repays for the climb up the rugged steps; and the picture gallery is no insignificant one. My ancestors were many, and they all thought it necessary to have their features limned by skilful fingers. The portraits are not few and far between."

"I shall enjoy seeing them," I declared.

"There is nothing more interesting than studying old family pictures."

"Do you think so?" he asked, with a laugh.

"Sometimes prefer studying flesh and blood—a living picture, when it is worth studying," and he accompanied the words with a look that pointed them, and brought a hot flush to my cheek and brow.

"I shall speak to Mrs. Ellis about it. Ah!" with a sigh, as the hand struck up another valise, "why do happy moments fly so quickly, and why must I go?"

"Because I suppose you are engaged to some one for this dance," I answered sarcastically, for I thought his sighs, and his manner generally a little absurd.

"That is exactly it," he acknowledged. "I am going to waltz with a very, and excellent damsel, round whose stout waist I shall be hardly able to stretch my arm, and whose weight will equal that of a young oak tree."

"A flattering description."

"Nevertheless true."

"Show me this human oak tree, and I will tell you if I think it true or not," I said rising, and moving towards the door.

"You are in a great hurry," he grumbled. "I suppose you will be glad to be rid of the society of an old fellow like me."

"You are not old."

"Am I not?" he laughed, and as we stepped out of the dim conservatory, into the brilliant room, involuntarily I raised my eyes for a good look at him.

"Well," he queried after a full moment.

"You are not so young as I thought you were," I announced with disagreeable candour, for the light showed me a few grey hairs sprinkled amid the raven locks, and some lines about the mouth and eyes; "but you are not old."

"Almost old to a child like you," he said, dreamily, "for I am nearly forty;" and then with a bow he left me and sought his partner.

He had scarcely left my side when my father approached.

"Ruby," he said, with marked coldness, "there is one thing I must insist on."

"And that is?" I queried fearfully.

"That you dance, at least once, with Lord Devedale."

"I cannot, I cannot," I cried quickly, clenching my hands till the nails wounded the soft flesh.

"You must," he rejoined, sternly, "if only for the sake of appearance. I don't know what your quarrel is, or what this mysterious acquaintance that you have made with him may be. To-morrow he tells me all; still I insist that you dance once with him to-night."

"Oh, father don't," I pleaded; "indeed I cannot."

"You must."

"If I must, then," I said, desperately, "make him promise not to open his lips to me, not to say one word while the dance lasts; this is the only condition under which I will consent to your command."

"So be it. I will tell him your wish," and my father went over and said something to Dick, after which he came slowly, yet not reluctantly towards me, silently offered his arm, which I as silently accepted; and without uttering one word we whirled in and out, in and out, amid the couples whirling round, never stopping till the music ceased, when, after a few strolls round the ball-room he led me up to aunt, and with a stiff bow walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

I was glad when the dance was over. It was terribly painful to me to feel Dick's arm around me, not with the old tender pressure, but barely touching my waist, as though I was some stranger to whom he had just been introduced, and then the sunny eyes that were wont to meet mine with such a loving look never turned on me, only stared steadily straight ahead, as he guided me through the snaky intricacies of the vale.

Of course this change was due to my own conduct, yet how, I asked myself angrily, could a woman with an atom of spirit have acted otherwise? He had been cruel, heartless, unbelieving—had inflicted many hours of suffering on me, had deceived me, had doubted me, and pride rose strongly within my bosom, and made me hold my head erect, and take the homage offered me by many of the gentlemen in the room, as if I were a duchess, and quite accustomed to adulation and flattery.

I flirted desperately with a young humorist, all moustache and drawl; a middle-aged attaché, scribbled and dyed, and got up to any extent; a sporting person, who was a particular friend of aunt's; and when Mr. Archdale came to claim his second dance I welcomed him so warmly and in such a marked manner that my other admirers fell back, and left the field clear for him, an advantage of which he was not slow to avail himself.

He took me in to supper, secured a little table in a corner, which we had all to our-

selves, and attended to my lightest wants with the most lover-like assiduity, and put his dark, sleek head much closer to mine, as he whispered soft nothings, than was absolutely necessary.

I found his small talk amusing, and it diverted me from my sad thoughts, so I listened with an air of deep attention as he chatted of the London theatres, the opera, the balls at Willis's, the concerts at St. James's, and spoke in glowing terms of Paris, Italy, Naples, Monaco; compared the gowns of English women with those of French and Austrian; asked my opinion of the last professional beauty; hoped he would never see my *carte* in the shop-windows; praised the fashions; touched on the latest art mania; and, finally, playing with my fan, tore it in fashionable *nonchalance*, and, I suspect purposely, then laughed to show his fine teeth, and declared I should have the best one that Paris could produce in less than a week.

"It does not matter in the least," I expostulated, looking at the ruin of what had been a pretty but inexpensive toy, composed of fluffy white feathers.

"It does, indeed," he rejoined, quickly. "I was fearfully clumsy, but I will make amends. I will send to Paris to-morrow for a new one."

"To like white, don't you?" interrogatively. "It goes with this," touching my tulle dress.

"Yes," I assented.

"Then it shall be white satin and pearls."

"No, no; indeed I could not accept anything so costly."

"You must, really."

"I could not."

"To please me. Promise you will accept it?"

His deep, constraining eyes were on me, felt powerless to refuse, and I murmured,—

"Yes."

Looking up at the same moment I found Dick was regarding us with little pleasure. The instant he saw I noticed him he turned away, and, bending over the lady at his side, began to pay her great attentions.

I don't know why, but I felt unreasonably angry as I saw his mounted lips close to her shell-like ear. She was a pretty blonde, a Miss Travers, and a near neighbour, so I concluded that they had met before, and were old friends.

It was no affair of mine now, of course. I told myself all was over between us, and yet—a sharp pang shot through my heart as she lifted her violet eyes, and looked up softly into the blue ones gazing down at her as they had often gazed at me.

I was flitting myself. That was a different matter, though. I was the injured, aggrieved person, while he was the injurer.

What right had he there, not six feet away from me, to parade his open admiration of another woman?

It made me feel wild, mad, reckless; and, with a loud laugh that attracted everyone's attention, I took Mr. Archdale's arm, and left the supper-room, returning to the dim seclusion of the conservatory.

I must have been out of my mind that night, else I would never have encouraged a man for whom I did not care two straws, nor have said the equivocal things I did, which might be interpreted two ways—to mean nothing, or to mean a great deal; and my companion, I fear, interpreted them in the latter way, and thought I was ready to fall in love with him.

Ah, met! If I could have lifted the veil, and taken a peep into futurity, how differently—how very differently—I should have acted, and what misery I might have spared myself and others!

But the future was a blank to me, and I went blindly on, caring for naught, save the moment's chatter, which kept me from thinking of my wrecked hopes, the downfall of all my castle-building, all my happy dreams!

"So you are going to make a fool of yourself and snub Lord Devedale, Walter tells me," observed my aunt, the next morning at break-

fast, as she fed Fido with dainty bits from the breast of a chicken, the greater part of which the over-fed monster deposited on the Turkey carpet.

"I don't know about making a fool of myself," I began.

"Then I do," she interrupted. "Worse than a fool! What prospects have you?"

"None," I answered, sullenly.

"That's true. Your father only just makes enough to support you and himself; and as for me, you know almost all I possess must go to my late husband's nephew."

"I know that."

"At the outside, all I shall have to leave you will be a few dresses (I shuddered at this as I thought of the apple-green silk), some jewellery, and fifty pounds a year."

"I don't want anything, aunt."

"Pooh! How are you to live—on love or air?"

"Neither. They are too unsubstantial. I can work."

"At what, pray?"

"As a governess or companion."

"Indeed. You think you are fitted for teaching?"

"I have had a good education."

"True. Still for all your accomplishments you would receive fifteen or twenty pounds a year and a shilling a week laundry money, whereas to being a companion you're much too good-looking for that post. The unmarried women would be too jealous to engage you, and the married ones, if they were wise, would not do so, as their husbands might prefer making love to you instead of to their lawful spouses."

"Aunt!" I ejaculated in horror.

"It's a fact. You're uncommon beauty, and you're improving every day, and you'll make sad havoc amongst male hearts, and female hearts also for the matter of that, for in the latter you will raise up sentiments of envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitable ones. Your best plan is to go in for a rich husband. If you won't have Devedale, why then take Allan Archdale?"

"Aunt!" I exclaimed again.

"He's quite as rich," she continued, coolly, not noticing my interruption; "only he hasn't a title. You won't mind that?"

"I don't suppose I shall, as it will not concern me," I returned, coldly.

"Stuff! It will concern you if you choose that it shall. Play your cards well and you may be mistress of the Hall."

"I have no cards to play, and if I had I shouldn't play them. I don't want to marry. Marriage is a mistake. A woman gives up her freedom, her individuality, her will, her comfort to a man, and in nine cases out of ten the man fails to appreciate the sacrifice and cries, like the horse-leech, more—more—more."

"Dear me! You seem to know a lot about it," and Mrs. Ellis adjusted her spectacles, and looked at me through them as though I was a strange and curious animal.

"I do," I sighed, thinking of Dick.

"Really. His lordship has taught you, I suppose?"

"Yes," with another sigh.

"Well, take my advice—be sensible and make up your difference, whatever it be, with him."

"I can't do that. He has acted too badly."

"That is what your father thinks you have done."

"Papa is not just then," I cried, hotly; "he does not know the rights of the case."

"He will, soon, for there comes your fiancé that was to have been, and he will tell the whole story."

"His version of it, and I hope it will be the true one."

"I hope so," returned Aunt, sententiously, "and that all will come right. He is a handsome fellow."

I lifted my drooping head as she spoke, and looked at the figure coming up the avenue.

The sun shone full on his face, and showed how white it was, and how heavy the eyes.

He walked with a slow, lagging step, very different to his usual springy stride, and a great air of dejection was visible in every movement.

Angry as I was, I found myself wishing that he would come and beg humbly to be taken back into favour in such a way that my pride would be appeased and my injured dignity calmed and soothed.

Yet I knew he was not the sort of man to do this. That he would never sue humbly for any woman's favour, and that if I did not make the first overtures towards reconciliation we should remain strangers for ever—that the wall which was growing up between us would, ere long, be so high that neither of us would be able to look over it, or touch the other's heart.

I wondered if he would seek an interview; try and see me after he had left papa; and, half-hoping he would, I seated myself by the window.

But an hour or two later I saw him going down the avenue, and he never even turned his head once, which added greatly to my wrath and indignation, and made me feel harder and more bitter against him. So when father came into the room to discuss the matter I was in a very haughty and unyielding state of mind.

"Well, Ruby," he began, "Basil"—he always called him that—"has been telling me everything, and I think—"

"That he has behaved very badly," I interrupted.

"I think it is a pity that he acted as he did, and also that you have taken it in such a manner."

"Is that all? I am of opinion that his conduct was infamous!"

"Rather a strong term."

"Not too strong, considering all things."

"His was a romantic idea."

"And a very cruel one."

"He did not mean to be so. He wanted you to learn to love him for himself, and not to marry him just because you thought you ought to do so."

"Indeed!" sarcastically.

"And, from what he tells me you do love him."

This was adding insult to injury, and I cried furiously,—

"Put it in the past tense, father, and say, 'did!'"

"Very well—did, then. Only, if your love has evaporated so quickly, I am inclined to think it was not the real thing; true and steadfast affection does not wither, like Jonah's gourd, in a single day, but stands many more rude shocks than that which yours has received."

"You forget his former conduct, I suppose?" I said, coldly, passing over this remark.

"What conduct?"

"His extreme reluctance to come to England to fulfil the engagement made for him, his ridiculous excuses and evident horror of my unfortunate self."

"Pooh! You exaggerate matters."

"Not at all. He was a laggard in love; and showed it only too plainly. He did not care for me."

"Perhaps not, as he had never seen you. But if he were reluctant then he is not so now. He loves you truly and devotedly, and you should think nothing of what he did before he saw you, for, if I remember rightly, you were not at all eager for a union with him."

This was true, and I hung my head, while a conscious blush spread over cheek and brow.

"Try and forget what has passed, child. Let your heart, and not your pride, rule you, and you will be happy."

"I cannot!—I cannot!" I cried, with an imperious gesture of dissent.

"Very well, so be it," said Dad, with visible annoyance. "With the usual obstinacy of your sex you are going to make a mess of your own future and of that of another. It is useless to appeal to a woman's common sense

when her vanity is wounded, therefore I shall leave you to your own devices," and he did.

From that day he never alluded, even in the most distant manner, to Lord Devedale, or anything connected with him, and I was left to the guidance of my own sweet will.

Somehow or the other I was not quite satisfied with this arrangement of affairs. Time hung heavily on my hands.

Aunt's house was a charming one, all gables, and mullioned windows and latticed panes, wreathed in the ivy of centuries' growth, and surrounded by a pretty garden, and beyond two or three acres of parklike ground; still, after I had examined all its queer nooks and corners, and strolled about the quaint, old-world garden, and visited the woods beyond, there seemed nothing more to be done, a sudden stagnation fell on my life.

I missed the excitement of the stolen interviews with my quondam lover, the rows on old Father Thames' broad bosom, the delightful walks in Richmond Park, and, above all, the tender adieu that had passed between us.

I became dull and listless, and hardly listened to Bessie's artless chatter, which would, under any other circumstances, have enlivened and amused me.

Altogether I was in such a gloomy and dejected frame of mind, that at the end of a week, when Mr. Archdale called, I welcomed him warmly, and in such a fashion that it gave him evident pleasure, which he was at no pains whatever to conceal.

"I have brought the fan," he said, after awhile, drawing a box from his pocket. "I hope you will like it," and he unfolded a costly toy of white satin embroidered with fine pearls.

"How lovely!" I cried, taking it in my hand. "It is very, very kind of you to give it to me."

"No, it is kind of you to take it," he whispered. "Does it really please you?"

"Indeed, it does!"

"Then I am glad—that I can please you."

I looked up at these words, and something in the ring of his tones and the light in his eyes startled me.

Those dark orbs held mine for fully a moment, and when I could turn them away a queer sensation crept over me.

I felt as though I had just awoke from a bad dream—a nightmare—and as if the horror and fear of it was still on me. I shook this feeling off after awhile, and went on talking gaily enough, listening to his plans for a party at his place to view the old antiquities and the family portraits.

"Will Wednesday suit you, Mrs. Ellis?" he asked.

"Very well," she assented, graciously.

"Then we will fix on that day. I shall expect you to lunch at two; that will leave us plenty of time to do the sight-seeing afterwards."

"Yes," she assented again, "that will suit us admirably."

So the matter was settled, and the next Wednesday we set off in aunt's comfortable brouche, and, after a pleasant drive, reached Archdale Hall.

It was a fine, substantial, Cromwellian building of grey stone, with splendid grounds surrounding it, in which herded the graceful deer, and where through the bracken ran the timid hare and rabbit.

On the lawn before the house was a group of ladies and gentlemen, and the first head my eyes lighted on was Dick's curly, golden one, and standing beside him was Miss Travers, looking lovelier than ever in a pale blue gown, and barbaric silver ornaments.

The sight of them standing there together, a little apart from the others, gave me a shock. Dick was consoling himself quietly and quickly, and with a charming girl. Why shouldn't I do likewise?

There seemed to me to be no reason why I

shouldn't, so I smiled sweetly into Allan Archdale's dark eyes as he helped me to alight from the carriage, and let him hold my hand in his without making the least effort to withdraw it, while he whispered,—

"Welcome to my home."

Lord Devedale, in duty bound, came forward with the others to greet us, but our hands hardly met, and no word passed between us, though dad and aunt both chatted with him. At lunch he devoted himself to Miss Travers, while our host was equally attentive to me; and when we strolled into the grounds the same order of things prevailed. We investigated the tiny, partially-ruined chapel, built in a hollow, with its stone coffins projecting on either side of the altar, its queer figures carved on the walls, its statue of a gigantic crusader, in helm and shirt of mail; its foliated window and time-worn font; and then we passed out through the old lych-gate, with its queer-pointed porch, and wended our way to the tower.

Here most of the middle-aged folk gave in, and sat in the paved courtyard, and some of the young ones too, and in the end only Bessie and the sporting parson, Lord Devedale and Miss Travers, Mr. Archdale and myself, had courage to mount the rough steps to see the view. In going up I stumbled, and would have fallen, only that our host was too quick, and caught me in his arms. For a moment he held me there, and when, covered with blushes and confusion, I released myself, I saw that Dick, who was going on before, had turned and witnessed the whole proceeding, and it gave me a wild feeling of delight to see him savagely gnaw his under lip as Mr. Archdale's arms encircled me.

"It's worth the scramble, isn't it?" asked the latter, as we emerged from a narrow door, and stood on a terrace railed in that ran round the tower.

"Indeed, it is," I assented, feasting my eyes on the fair scene that lay like a panorama below—a beautiful stretch of forest, woodland, vale, and dell, belted, in the far distance, by great purple mountains, purpled with the swift-gathering haze of the autumn day, that was beginning to blot and blur far-away outlines and dim the radiance of the steady sunshine that shone on the near, newly-reaped fields, till the stubble glittered like blades of spun silk, and the fading bracken and leafage of the woods and commons, shone like tawny gold.

"I can fancy myself 'lord of all I survey' up here—so far from the 'madding crowd.'"

"Yes, you can easily do that."

"I wish I could as easily fancy myself lord of something else, of far greater value to me," he said, significantly, glancing at me.

"We can't have all we wish for," I answered, with a carelessness I did not feel, for I was beginning to be a little, just a little, bit afraid of Mr. Archdale and his passionate glances—afraid that he would say words that would not be pleasant for me to hear; and murmuring something about the pictures, I turned away, and, keeping very close to Bessie and her sporting clerical friend, commenced the descent.

CHAPTER VII.

This portrait gallery was a fine oak-panelled room, with side and top-lights, that showed off to advantage the numerous pictures that lined the dark walls.

No wonder the master of Archdale Hall was proud of the family portraits, for they represented a goodly crew of dames and squires from the time of the Plantagenets to the present era. There were stout gentlemen of bluff King Hal's reign, ladies of Elizabeth's Court, in ruff and stomacher; sad-faced heroes of Jacobinical tendencies, and warriors who frowned fiercely under full-bottomed wigs; while scantily-clothed females, similar to those depicted by Sir Peter Lely, were not few and far between, but smirked and languished from the canvas on all sides.

"I duly admired the beauties, the stern warriors, and the sickly dandies, and listened to the little anecdotes and stories Mr. Archdale had to tell of each one."

"That is my grandfather," he remarked, pointing at the full-length portrait of a handsome, wild-looking man, with buckled shoes, wide-skirted coat, and powdered hair, that showed up the dark, glowing eyes, made them look as though they gleamed and sparkled.

"Very good-looking. He is like you!" I exclaimed.

"Thanks, for the compliment," he laughed. "He was very good-looking, but came to a bad end, as I hope I shall not."

"Indeed!" I ejaculated, feeling much interested.

"Yes. His misfortunes arose out of an unrequited love. We Archdales were, and are somewhat fierce. We hate fiercely, and love fiercely, 'overpoweringly, to the death.' His eyes sought mine as he spoke, and I shivered from head to foot, as though the balmy west wind that stole in through the open windows was chill as the biting northern blast of mid-winter. "His ghost is said to haunt this gallery."

"Is it?" I cried, quickly, glad of anything that would give me an excuse for following the others, who were filing out by the further door. "Then let us leave his domain at once, lest he comes to object to our being here," and I made a movement to follow the others, but he laid his hand on my arm.

"Stay," he said, quietly. "I have something else to show you—something for your eyes alone," and he turned to a picture covered with a curtain, that hung in a recess opposite the largest window; and pulling a cord, drew back the drapery, disclosing the picture of a lovely woman, with short, clustering black hair, luminous brown eyes, and a pale, pale face, white as new-fallen snow, on which the beams of the setting sun shone redly, giving life to the mobile lips and the gleaming eyes.

"Who is it like?" he asked.

"Myself!" I exclaimed, utterly astonished at the remarkable likeness. "Who is she?"

"She was my wife," he said, in a curious, smothered tone, and glancing at him I saw he looked ghastly.

"Your wife! I did not know you were married?"

"No, and few others either. It is fifteen years since she died, and I lost her within a year of our marriage."

"How sad," I murmured.

"Ay, sad, indeed! Do you pity me?" he demanded, abruptly, bending those strange dark orbs on me.

"Very much."

"And pity is akin to love."

"Not always," I answered, hurriedly, not at all liking the turn the conversation was taking, and wishing myself anywhere but where I was—anywhere out of the range of his glance, which held and fascinated me like the serpent's does the prey he means to destroy.

"I hope it is in this case," he said, earnestly, taking my reluctant hands in his, "for I want you to love me as I love you. You are like her," nodding at the pictured face, which seemed to regard us intently—"wonderfully like. For fifteen long and weary years I have mourned her; now—now I want the empty place in my heart filled, the silence and solitude banished from my home. You can make me happy, can drive the demon—memory, that sits ever grinning at my elbow, away. For as you sit by my hearth, and I look at you, I shall fancy that you and she are one, that she has come back from the land of shadows to gladden me once more with her sweet presence, and all the clouds of misery that have enveloped me so long will vanish away."

"Oh! Mr. Archdale, I am so sorry," I cried, shrinking away from his passionate gestures and looks; "indeed, I can't be your wife."

"Why not?" he asked, and over his face came a dull, grey look.

"Because—because I—I do not love you," I faltered.

"That is nothing," he cried, joyfully; "the love will come. My passion will win a response from you."

"No, no," I almost screamed, "I know I should never—never care for you in that way."

"Then why have you encouraged me?" he queried, coldly.

"I—I—did not mean to," I stammered, feeling horribly guilty and horribly afraid.

"Women never do, they say. I certainly thought from your manner that you would listen to my pleading, and say 'yes' when I asked you to be my wife."

"I am so very—very sorry."

"No doubt, now that the mischief is done. But beware," he continued, with a rapid change of manner; "we Archdales have a dash of the tiger in our composition—beware! You shall be the tiger's bride, or mate with no one. Have you a lover?" seizing my hand again, and bruising it in his rough clasp.

"Take care, if you have. Say adieu to him, for his sake and yours."

"You forget yourself," I said, coldly, struggling to escape from his detaining grasp.

"No, I don't, I wish I could—forget for a time, only a little time, the dreary past. You can make me do it, and you shall—by Heaven you shall!"

His face flushed, his eyes gleamed luridly, his lips drew near to mine, but, with a stifled shriek, I wrenched myself free, and flying the whole length of the gallery reached the stair-head, and with two bounds was in the hall.

I almost tumbled into Dick's arms, for he was standing at the bottom, and but for his supporting hand would certainly have fallen.

"What on earth is the matter?" he exclaimed, alarmed, no doubt, out of silence by my appearance and manner.

"Oh, Mr.—Mr.," I began, and then, remembering the necessity for concealing what had passed, at any rate from him, I stammered,

"I—I saw something up—up there!"

"Ah! the ghost, I suppose," with a little sneer.

That sneer went a long way towards calming me; and saying "Just so" with the utmost coolness, I walked into the library, where aunt was dispensing afternoon tea, and sat down very near her. Dick followed me, and a few minutes later our host entered.

I gave one swift look, and saw that, though deadly pale, there was no other outward sign of his recent violent emotion, but after that I carefully avoided meeting his glance, and kept my eyes glued to the floor, while I experienced a tremendous sense of relief when the baronette came round, and we set off on our homeward way, Mr. Archdale giving my hand an awful squeeze as he helped me into the carriage.

I was anything but happy during the next few days. I dreaded to see him appear, and when he called hid myself in my room and pleaded illness. I could not face his passionate, constraining looks. The dread I felt was, to me, unaccountable, until about a week later, when aunt, as she read an opistle from an old friend, who knew the Archdales, gave vent to sundry expressions of surprise.

"What is it?" I asked at last, for her ejaculations came fast and furious, while even Dad looked up from his perusal of the morning paper, and regarded her with mild surprise.

"Anything the matter?"

"Matter? Yes, indeed, a great deal is the matter. The man ought to be locked up. It's quite shocking to let him be at large," she returned, excitedly.

"Who is the man?"

"Mr. Archdale."

"Mr. Archdale!" I repeated, all attention now.

"Yes; there is madness in his family."

"Ah!" I said, sharply, understanding at last the look in his eyes which had puzzled me so sorely.

"He killed his wife!"
 "Aunt! impossible!"
 "He did! Mrs. Lorraine says so!" flourished the letter.
 "If he is a murderer why is he at large?"
 "Oh, he didn't actually kill her with his own hands!"

"What did he do, then?"
 "He was seized with a temporary fit of insanity ten months after their wedding-day, and threatened to stab her! The shock was so terrible to her—discovering that she had married a madman—that her child was born, and she and it were both dead before the week was out!"

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Dad; while I sat in speechless horror, understanding many things that had been mysteries to me before.

"Dreadful, indeed! And that is not all. His grandfather shot his wife through the heart, and then blew out his brains, because he found out she had married him for his money, and not for love, as he imagined!"

"Nice people to know!"
 "Very!" agreed Mrs. Ellis, sarcastically.
 "Allan Archdale was five years in a lunatic asylum!"

"I am not surprised to hear it. I don't at all like the look of him. You had better be out when he calls again, Jane!"

"You may be sure I shall not see him!" rejoined Aunt, with an uneasy look at me.

My feelings I cannot describe. I literally quaked with fear. This mania had sworn that I should be his wife; refusal would madden him, and he would most likely resort to the argument of the knife. For me, or, if he found out, for the man I loved! What horror in the thought!

My life became a burden; and after a week of agony, during which I hardly dared to venture outside the door, and my would-be suitor called twice, and was refused admittance, I went to Dad, and told him that I wanted to go home—to our miniature mansion on the banks of the Thames.

One sharp glance he gave at my white face and heavy eyes, and then said,—

"Very well! We will start to-morrow," thinking probably that I was fretting about Dick, and would be better out of his immediate vicinity.

True I was; but the other cause was what weighed my spirits down most, and made me utterly wretched; for I feared for his life if my savage suitor discovered we had ever been dear to each other.

With what delight, then, did I hear him consent to my request! It seemed to me that there might be a chance of escape for me in sudden flight; and after dinner, as I stood by the open window, hope for him—Dick—and myself stirred faintly in my heart.

"Why don't you go out and take a turn in the garden?" suggested Aunt; "you look so pale. It might do you good. Here, you can take this wrap."

For a moment I hesitated, then reflecting that as Mr. Archdale had called that afternoon, and ridden away with a very black look on his brow, after having been told we were out, he would be at home, and I quite safe in our own grounds, I took the shawl and strolled out.

The night was soft and warm, and moonlit; the air sweet with the scent of many flowers, and the perfume of the dew-drenched turf. All was so peaceful, so calm, that I wandered on, unthinking till I came to the larch spinney, and then stood leaning on the gate, watching the play of the moonbeams on the deep pond that lay on the far side of the spinney.

I don't know how long I stood there, whether a minute or an hour, but a hand touching my arm roused me from my reverie. With a start I turned and confronted Mr. Archdale.

"You!" I exclaimed, stepping back with a shiver of horror.

"Yes; are you glad to see me?"
 "Ye—es," I faltered, not daring to say no, as I glanced at his face, which looked wild, and white, and drawn in the cold moonbeams.

"Then show it, love, kiss me."

He bent his face towards mine, but I wriggle away.

"Why won't you kiss me?"

"I—I—can't—Mr. Archdale."

"Why do you call me that? I am Allan, your Allan. Don't you know me, wife?"

"You are mistaken," I cried, desperately, shaking from head to foot with fear, for I saw the man was mad. "I am not your wife."

"Take care, take care," he said, warningly, "you'll wake the tiger that sleeps within me. You are mine—mine!" and he pressed nearer, his lurid eyes gleaming and burning.

"You forget yourself," I said, with all the firmness I could assume; "and the respect due to me. Let me pass."

"Why should I let you go, now that I have found you after so many dreary years of waiting? You must stay with me always, wife, darling;" he flung both arms round me, and held me for a moment crushed to his breast, the next I had torn myself free, and was flying towards the house, screaming for help, swiftly followed by the infuriated maniac.

At my screams a man came running towards us, and I saw it was Lord Devedale.

"Dick—Dick," I cried, "save me—help me," and clung to him.

"What is it—what is it?" he asked, drawing me to him, but ere I could answer the madman was on us.

Something bright glittered in his hand, and he struck straight at me. Dick warded off that blow with his arm, and I felt the warm blood splash in my face. Quick as lightning the dagger was withdrawn, and Archdale struck again with all his force; the second blow fell on my lover's breast, and with one low cry he reeled to the ground, dragging me with him.

Archdale looked at us a second, and then tossing the murderous weapon high in the air, shouted,—

"My bride! My bride in life and death!" and fled away into the darkness of the night.

The moment I saw Dick stretched lifeless and bleeding on the ground the scales fell from my eyes, and I realised how dearly—how passionately—I loved him still, and horror and fear robbed me of consciousness.

When I came to I was lying in my own room at aunt's, and dad and she were bending over me.

"Dick," I murmured, feebly. "Where is Dick?"

"He is here," answered my father.

"Is—is he—?" My lips refused to form the dreaded word.

"No, he is not dead."

"Is he much hurt?"

"Some nasty stabs."

"Will he recover?"

"We hope so," he replied, guardedly.

"I must go to him."

"You cannot. You must lie still."

But I sobbed so pitifully that they let me get up, and helped me into aunt's room, where Dick was lying still and quiet, with one bandaged hand outside the quilt, and his pale face buried in the pillows.

At the sight of him—so weak and helpless-looking, I burst into silent tears, and, kneeling by the bed, kissed the poor injured hand that had saved me from the murderer's knife.

The wound in his breast was deep and dangerous, but not, thank Heaven! fatal. After many weary days of suspense and anxiety he began to mend slowly, and recover his lost strength.

I felt I could not do enough for him, and, only that they would not let me, would have nursed him entirely myself. This was not permitted, so I had to content myself with making his room bright with flowers, reading to him, and doing all I could to cheer him.

I was free from Mr. Archdale. He was safe in a private lunatic asylum; still, though that fear was off my mind, my cheek grew paler and paler, and my eyes more sad, day by day, for I knew when Dick could move he was to go to Ventnor, and that that meant I must part from him, the man, I knew now, I loved

better than my life, my pride, or anything in the whole world.

"You ought to go out; you look pale," he said to me the first day he was brought down to the drawing-room, as he lay looking out at the garden.

"I do so. I have been out this morning."

"Then you shouldn't look so white."

"Shouldn't I?"

"No. Haven't you recovered from the fright that fellow gave you?"

"Yes, from that, but not from something else," with a deep sigh.

"What is that?"

"The way I treated you. Oh, Dick!" falling on my knees beside him, and fondling his hand; "can you ever forgive me?"

"Yes, dear. I forgave you long ago," he answered, gently, with a little wistful look at me from the dear blue eyes that went straight to my heart and pierced it.

"But—but—you—you—don't—love me—as you did?"

"Who says I don't?"

"I know you can't."

"What does this mean, Ruby?" he queried, doubtfully.

"It—it—means—that—that I was wrong," I whispered, faintly. "That I love you more than ever."

"My darling!" and drawing me to his breast, he said,—

"We will float down the stream of life together, then, sweetheart, after all."

"Yes, after all," I answered, shyly; and as I raised my eyes to the debonaire face, I felt that fate had been kinder to me than I deserved, since my love-dream held for me so happy an ending.

[THE END.]

MONEY never made a man happy yet, nor will it; there is nothing in its nature to produce happiness; the more a man has the more he wants; instead of its filling a vacuum it makes one; if it satisfies one want it doubles and trebles that want another way.

MAKING A QUEEN.—Bees do not usually want more than one queen. In fact, they will not have more than one unless the swarm has grown so large as to crowd the hive and they are going to found a colony, or "swarm," as it is called; in which case each family will need a sovereign. As soon as it is clear to the wiseacres that it will be necessary to send off a swarm, the bees go to work to make a queen. A worker maggot, or if there happens to be none in the hive, a worker egg is selected near the edge of the comb. Two cells next door to the one in which this maggot is are cleared out, and the dividing walls are cut down, so that three ordinary cells are turned into one. The food which the worker worm has been feeding on is removed, and the little creature is supplied with a new kind of food—a royal jelly. Change of food, a larger room, and a different position—the queen's cell hangs down instead of being horizontal—these three changes of treatment turn the bee that is developing from a worker into a queen. She is different in her outer shape, different in almost all her organs, and different in every single instinct. There is nothing else in all nature that seems to me more wonderful than this. For fear that one queen may not come out all right, the provident little creatures usually start two or three queen-cells at once. It is curious to watch the first queen as she comes out. She moves up and down the comb, looking for other queen-cells, and if she finds one, she falls upon it in the greatest excitement, and stings her rival to death. Sometimes, by accident, two new queens come out at the same time; then it is wonderful to see the bees. They clear a space and bring the two rivals together, and stand back to watch the fight. And it is a royal fight indeed; a fight to the death, for they never give up till one or the other is fatally stung. The victor is then accepted as sovereign.

FACETIÆ.

In machinery, an eccentric and a crank amount to the same thing. You will find the same coincidence among men.

When John Smith was police-courted the other day for pouncing his wife on the head, he escaped punishment on the ground that he was only banging her hair.

Mrs. PARSONSON says it is not true that Ike has ulsters in his throat. Nevertheless, the doctors insisted that it was coated with something.

TO BE TAKEN IN SMALL DOSES.—Some tasteful individual very correctly remarks that the best lip salve in creation is a kiss. The remedy should be used with great care, however, as it is apt to bring on an affection of the heart.

A young lady explained to her lover the distinction between printing and publishing, and at the conclusion of her remarks, by way of illustration, she said: "You may print a kiss on my cheek, but you must not publish it."

THE RUSSIAN Government has taken charge of the pawnbroking business of the empire. The empire has not been considered a paternal government, but it is the next thing to it when it assumes the functions of the uncle.

A PRUDENT master advised his servant to put by his money for a rainy day. In a few weeks his master inquired how much of his wages he had saved. "Faith, none at all," said he. "I did as you bid me; it rained yesterday—I took a drop, and it all went."

A LECTURER, being caught in a shower on his way to the hall, said to a friend: "I shall catch a terrible cold if I go on with my lecture in these wet clothes." "Oh, no, you won't," answered the friend; "you are always sure to be dry enough on the platform."

PLEBE AND PLAIN.—"Your wife's fat, but she's not handsome, Smith." "Well, Jones, that's expressing your opinion plump and plain, anyhow." "You are right, Smith—that's exactly my notion; she is very plump and very plain."

"NATURE has written 'honest man' on his face," said a man to Douglas Jerrold, speaking of a person in whom Jerrold's faith was not altogether blind. "Humph!" replied the wit, "then the pen must have been a very bad one."

A HYPOCRITICAL old man, who pretended to be very pious, undertook to reprove a carman for profanity by saying to him: "Don't you think I shall appear as a swift witness against you on the day of judgment?" The carman replied: "I suppose so, as the biggest rogue is always the first to turn Queen's evidence."

NOTHING IS NOT COMBATIVE.—A story is told of two Scotsmen, who travelled together three days in a stage-coach without a word ever passing between them. On the fourth day one of them at length ventured to remark that it was a fine morning. "And who said it wasn't?" was the reply.

A MAN lost his hat in a well, and was let down by a rope to recover it; but the well being deep, and extremely dark within, his courage failed him before he had reached the water. In vain did he call out to those above to pull him up; they lent him a deaf ear to all he said, till at last, quite in despair, he belaboured out, "If you don't draw me up, sure I'll cut the rope."

A young actor offered himself to the manager of a theatre, who desired him to give a specimen of his abilities to the stage-manager. After he had rehearsed a speech or two in a wretched manner, he was asked whether he had ever acted any part in comedy. The young man answered that he had played the part of Abel in the *Alchemist*. To which his interrogator replied: "You surely are wrong; it was the part of Cain you acted, for I am sure you murdered Abel."

LITTLE GIRL: "Mamma, let me carry the baby." Mamma: "No, darling; you are too little. You might let it fall." Little Girl: "Well, may I have it when it's worn out?"

"Ma, this paper says there are 8,950 bands of mercy in this country. What is a band of mercy?" "An association for charitable purposes, child." "Oh, I thought it meant a brass band that didn't practise evenings."

"FIFTY pounds bid, gentlemen!" cried the auctioneer at an art sale; "only fifty pounds for this fine landscape, with its flowers, trees, water, atmosphere,—and such an atmosphere! Why, the atmosphere alone is worth the money."

SCIENCE tells us that after a bee has stung once it takes two minutes to recover the power to sting again. It doesn't take the stung person two seconds to get out of the way of a second sting.

"Ha! ha! That's a good one on women," laughed Mr. DULMAN, the other morning. "What tickles you now?" asked Mrs. DULMAN. "Why, ha! ha! a doctor says more than half the women are fools." "Yes," replied Mrs. DULMAN, wearily; "I think he is right. Most women marry."

LANDLADY (to lodger): "Beg pardon, sir, did I understand that you was a doctor of music?" Lodger: "I am, ma'am. Why?" Landlady: "Well, sir, my Billy 'ave just bin and broke his concertina, and I thwat as 'ow I should be glad to put a good job in yer way."

A MAN and wife, who had been married for several years, were riding in a railway carriage. The wife, turning to the husband, who was reading a newspaper, asked, "dearest, lend me, for a moment, the paper you are reading." "Certainly, my dear," was his reply, "as soon as we reach a tunnel."

"So you've been practising at the skating rink, eh?" said a friend to Simpkins. "Yes," admitted Simpkins, "I have." "Well, how do you take to the rollers?" "Oh, I've no objection to the rollers. They're all right. It's the chalk on the floor I object to. It's so darned hard to brush off."

A NUMBER of wallflowers at a ball were watching and making comments upon the waltzers. "Now," said one of the ornaments, "look at Madam de X—, What grace, and how youthful she still looks!" "True," replied another; "and to think that she is old enough to be her own mother."

ANGRY WIFE (time 2 A.M.): "Is that you, Charlie?" Jolly Husband: "Zash me." Angry Wife: "Here have I been standing at the head of the stairs these two hours. Oh, Charles, how can you?" Jolly Husband (bracing up): "Standin' on your head on the t'shairs! Jennie, I am surpris'd! How can I? By Jove, I can't! Two hours, too! Stronary woman!"

HIS GOOD NAME.—I see young Thurston is to be tried for forgery. I thought he would have had more respect for his good name. "His regard for a good name is what got him into trouble." "How can you make that appear?" "He used somebody else's name."

"I AM shocked, Bobby," said his mother, severely, "that you should go to see a game of cricket on Sunday. Think how grieved your father will be when I inform him of it." "Oh, you needn't do that," replied Bobby; "he knows it." "Oh, you told him, did you?" "No, he saw me there."

A young lady whose very best young man lived over the way with his parents took a seat by the window one cloudy morning. "Why do you sit by the window such a chilly morning, Laura?" asked her mother. "I'm waiting for the son to come out, ma," she replied.

HERBERT's mamma took him to Sunday-school the other day, and the lesson being on the depravity of the human heart, the teacher drew a large heart on the blackboard by way of illustration. "Mamma," said Herbert with a nudge, "will she draw a spade next?"

THE story is told of a patient who was directed by his physician to take one pill three times a day in any convenient vehicle. The dictionary showed the word vehicle to mean "carriage, omnibus, tramcar, waggon, cart." Thereupon he concluded to ride out every time he took a pill, and the result was that he improved wonderfully.

DRESS AND ADDRESS.—A rustic beauty was courted by two swains, a fashion-plate young clerk and a country lawyer who was careless in his attire, but very clever. When reproached by a friend for keeping both lovers in suspense, the girl said she was hesitating between dress and address.

"WHAT do you think of Mr. Thompson, ma?" "He seems to be very nice, but I would not encourage him if I were you." "Why, mamma?" "He has red hair, and red-haired men are always deceitful." "But papa has red hair." "Well, not quite red, child. It's quite red enough, though."

"HELLO, doctor!" exclaimed Blank, "where are you going?" "They've sent for me up at Fenderson's; he's very sick, they say." "But how did he happen to send for you? He said, the other night, that you were a horse doctor." "And pray why shouldn't a horse doctor be a safe man to treat a donkey?"

"HELLO, hello!" shrieked Jones to Smith, this morning. "Hello!" "I'm not walking telephone to be 'helloed' at. Why don't you say 'good morning' to a gentleman?" "I do when I meet one." The bells closed, and the ballots were counted. It was a tie: Neither party had carried the day.

A FASCINATING woman is employed by the secret police to get at the secrets of a foreign diplomatist. The following correspondence is exchanged by telegraph between the minister of foreign affairs and his emissary: "Your report is vague. Obtain further particulars." "Am having a lover's quarrel with him. Shall be reconciled to-morrow; will send full details." She is, and does.

THEY were talking over an aged millionaire who has on several occasions given his heirs high hopes—high hopes always dashed by his recovery. "Curious how long the old man lasts!" says somebody, reflectively; "especially when you consider that for the last ten years he has had one foot in the grave." "Yes; but then, you see, every now and then he changes the foot."

A CRITIC dropped into a studio in Paris one day, stopped before the portrait of a lady on an easel, and remarked, "It is very nicely painted; but why did you take such an ugly model?" "It is my mother," calmly replied the artist. "Oh, pardon a thousand times!" said the critic, in great confusion. "You are right; I ought to have perceived it; it resembles you exactly."

AN old lady was recently brought as a witness before a bench of magistrates, and when asked to take off her bonnet, obstinately refused to do so, saying: "There's no law compelling a woman to take off her bonnet." "Oh," imprudently replied one of the magistrates, "you know the law, do you? Perhaps you would like to come up and sit here and teach us?" "No, I thank you, sir," said the woman, tartly; "there are old women enough there now."

THE late Duke of Buccleuch and the Duke of Northumberland once found themselves in a carriage going northward with a commercial traveller. The conversation was general between the three. At Alnwick Station the Duke of Northumberland got out, and was borne away in a showy equipage. "That must be a swell," said the commercial traveller. "Do you know who it is?" "The Duke of Northumberland," replied his Grace of Buccleuch. "And they say," exclaimed the traveller, "that our nobility is haughty! Why, he talked to you and me as though we had been his equals."

SOCIETY.

THE Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales gave a birthday party at Marlborough House on the eighteenth birthday of the Princess Louise of Wales, their eldest daughter. The guests numbered about one hundred, and besides the members of the family included chiefly the most intimate friends of the Prince.

THE erection of a chapel at Cannes in memory of the late Duke of Albany, says a contemporary, on a site given by Mr. Savile, adjoining the Villa Nevada, in which His Royal Highness died, is an excellent idea. The site was chosen by the Prince of Wales during his recent visit, when he also appointed a committee. The chapel is to be dedicated to St. George, the Patron Saint of England.

THE marriage of Lady Elena Gordon, fifth daughter of the late Marquis of Huntly and sister of the present Marquis, with Major Wickham, of the Royal Horse Guards, took place at St. Mark's Church, North Audley-street, on Feb. 28. The bride wore a dress of rich white Ottoman silk made perfectly plain, with a long full train and tight-fitting corsage trimmed with sprays of orange-blossom. Her veil was of exquisite old point lace, the gift of her mother, the Dowager Marchioness of Huntly. Her ornaments were diamond crescents, the gift of the bridegroom.

THERE were four bridesmaids, all little girls—Miss Beatrice Gordon, Miss Armyne Gordon, nieces of the bride, and the two Misses Wickham, nieces of the bridegroom. They were dressed in pretty costumes of Indian shawl, trimmed with white fox and white velvet, with hats to match. Each wore a small enamelled brooch, the gift of the bridegroom.

THE service was fully choral. At the conclusion of the ceremony the bridal party repaired to Hereford-gardens, where the wedding-breakfast was served. In the afternoon the newly-married couple left town for York, en route for Major Wickham's country seat, Parkin Hall, Yorkshire.

A VERY stylish wedding was that of Mr. G. V. Buchanan, son of the late Right Hon. Sir Andrew Buchanan, Bart., G.C.B., with the lady Georgina Meriel Bathurst, eldest daughter of Earl Bathurst. The bride was followed by five bridesmaids, and was attired in white satin, the train being long and plain, and the petticoat draped with Brussels lace, caught on one side with loops and ends of satin, terminating with pearl tassels; the bodice was trimmed with lace and orange blossom. She wore a wreath of orange blossom and Brussels lace veil, and carried a large bouquet.

THE bridesmaids, three of whom were little children, were prettily dressed in skirts of cream Valenciennes lace, with bodices and drapery of cream nun's veiling; the collars and cuffs were of geranium red velvet, with lace of which the drapery was looped up, and they had gathered toques of the same velvet. Each wore a necklace of gold coins, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a large bouquet of snowdrops.

ON the 20th February, at St. Peter's Church, Eaton-square, Mr. Louis Guy Scott, son of the late Colonel the Hon. Charles Grantham Scott, was married to Miss Inna Georgiana Milles, only daughter of the late Colonel the Hon. Lewis Watson Milles, Rifle Brigade, and niece of Earl Sondes. It was a very pretty wedding, and the bride was attired in white satin duchesse, trimmed with old lace, and over a wreath of orange blossom a Brussels lace veil. The four bridesmaids wore dresses of pale blue satin, mer-vellous and coffee-coloured lace, the bodice and skirt being of satin, the latter flounced and draped with lace. The two elder ladies wore lace bonnets trimmed with pale blue ribbon and birds, and the younger ones had small Tam-o'-Shanter hats of satin.

STATISTICS.

THE average length of human life is thirty-one years, and is on the increase.

OR the whole population of the globe it estimated that 90,000 die every day.

THE MILITIA AND YEOMANRY.—A return has been presented to Parliament showing the establishment of each regiment of Militia in the United Kingdom, and the effective force at the training of 1884. The establishment shows a total of all ranks of 137,991. The total present at last year's training was 100,092, the total enrolled being 113,787. There were absent with and without leave 12,992, and the number wanting to complete the establishment was 24,204. The number of men enrolled for the Militia Reserve since the previous training is 6,618. A second Parliamentary paper giving the Yeomanry Cavalry training returns for last year fixes the establishment at 14,404. The total number enrolled is 11,488, and of these 9,548 were present at, and 1,940 were absent from last year's training.

GEMS.

SOME men are as covetous as if they were to live for ever; and others are as profuse as if they were to die the next moment.

THE action of a man is a type of his thought and will; and a work of charity is a type of the charity within, in the soul and the mind.

IT is certain that either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught as men take diseases of another; therefore, let them take heed of their company.

WHETHER young or old, think it neither too soon nor too late to turn over the leaves of your past life and consider what you would do if what you have done were to be done again.

MERE polish does not make a man; nor does a rough exterior necessarily make a man. The man is within. What is the heart made of? What is the grasp of intellect? What is the quantum of solid common sense? What are you doing for others and God? These are questions by which to test manhood. See that your life and your work, wherever your place is, will abide these tests.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GREENS.—Wash the greens well, and take off the outside leaves. Tie them in small bunches, and boil in plenty of fast-boiling water; drain them in front of the fire, and serve cold with a mixture of three parts oil, one of vinegar, pepper and salt to taste, poured over them.

TO FRY SALSIFY.—Scrape and boil with a little suet until soft. Then take it out, mash it with a little butter, pepper, and salt. A tablespoonful of butter to a quon. Make them into small cakes. Flour them, and fry in butter. Parsnips may be dressed in the same way.

MINCED PORK.—Mince two pounds of cold roast pork, freeing it from any fat or skin, and seasoning it with pepper and salt and a little dry mustard. Cut up six or eight large tart apples, mincing them very fine, first removing the skins and cores. Put the minced apples into a saucepan with a quarter of a pound of good butter, and four medium-sized onions, also minced. Set the saucepan over a moderate fire, and cook the contents until tender, stirring them to prevent burning. When tender, add half a cupful of the roast pork gravy (or the same quantity of good stock), two tablespoonfuls of vinegar, and a little brown thickening. When the sauce has boiled for five minutes, stir in the minced pork, and when it becomes thoroughly hot squeeze in a little lemon juice, and serve at once.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CLOCK made entirely of bread is a curiosity at one of the breweries in Italy.

CUSTOM compels an Icelandic, in his native island, to kiss every woman he meets.

A FRENCH astronomer claims to have discovered a mountain twenty miles high on the planet Venus.

AMONG the Arabs the belief is prevalent that washing the face is simply an indirect form of suicide.

A SELINTER of a deer's hoof, with powerful microscopes and polarized light, is as wonderful to see as a rainbow.

BEFORE the invention of the sundial or clocks, time was measured by the length of shadows cast from a fixed object.

IN THEIR OWN AGE.—The greatest men, whether poets or historians, live entirely in their own age. Dante paints Italy in the thirteenth century; Chaucer, England in the fourteenth; Masaccio, Florence in the fifteenth; Tintoretto, Venice in the sixteenth. If it be said that Shakespeare wrote perfect historical plays on subjects belonging to the preceding centuries, it may be answered that they are perfect plays just because there is no care about centuries in them, a rogue in the fifteenth century being at heart what a rogue is in the nineteenth, and was in the twelfth, and an honest or knightly man being very similar to other such at any other time.

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT.—The extensive diffusion of the principle of freedom of thought among us is an inestimable blessing; yet we need to realise that this, like all other freedom, imposes an additional obligation upon the individual conscience. If we are no longer asked to submit our beliefs to the dictum of another in matters of religion, or government, or literary criticisms, or scientific conclusions, or social observances, or anything else, it is all the more incumbent upon us honestly and earnestly to seek after the truth for ourselves. If no one has the right to censure us for our opinions, whatever they may be, we have a consequent duty of self-scrutiny to find out how and why we came to believe thus and so, whether our motives were pure and our grounds sufficient. And, if our time and powers are too limited for the close investigation of many subjects, we may at least learn more modestly in assertion and more kindly toleration for the mistakes of others.

SUGAR MADE FROM POTATOES BY ELECTRICITY.—Although glucose can be easily prepared from various amylaceous substances, all attempts to artificially produce saccharose or cane sugar have hitherto been unsuccessful, but it is now announced that the synthesis of saccharose has just been accomplished by Messrs. Aubert and Giraud, and it is naturally anticipated that the discovery may eventually be of vast importance to the sugar industry. The process consisted essentially in submitting amylaceous matter derived from the potato, after it has been converted into glucose in the usual manner, to the action of an electric current equal to about 75 volts. The electrodes were immersed in the solution, and the current reversed from time to time. The reaction terminated in about two hours, and the finish was indicated by the liquid no longer giving the characteristic colour with tincture of iodine or a precipitate with alcohol. The liquid was afterwards defecated by means of lime, which was subsequently removed by carbonic anhydride, and the sirup was then decolourised and left to crystallise. The crystallised product upon analysis yielded 88.38 of saccharose, 1 per cent of glucose, 367 per cent of ash, and 6.95 per cent of water; it was, therefore, far from being pure cane sugar. At present it has not been decided whether the reaction consists in the dehydration of glucose, the union of a molecule of dextrine with one of glucose, or the hydration of dextrine.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G.—Give notice on the next quarter-day.
W. M.—The 2nd of November, 1844, was a Saturday.
A. M. G.—Change of air is what would suit you best under the circumstances.

W. G.—There is no necessity for the matter to go to a law court. It ought to be easily settled.

A. L. R.—For tender feet, a capital remedy is to bathe them with cold whiskey-and-water.

W. C. R.—You must give six months' notice, expiring with the time at which you took the house.

L. L. V.—No license is required. You can enter upon the business at once.

C. V. W.—It would not be right to take any notice of the affair unless it is brought before your parents. Then you would have an opportunity to state your case.

A. V. W.—The lesson is one easily learnt. It is your bounden duty to obey those who are placed in authority over you.

M. A.—The apprentice can leave at the age of twenty-one whether his indentures are up or not, but whoever signed them is liable for damages.

L. C. S.—Gloves have been in use from the earliest days of civilisation. Yervil, in Somerset, is a great place for them.

A. V. V.—Unskilled female labour is worth so little that you cannot expect to find any profitable work which can be taken up at intervals at home by all young women. If you have skill and taste, decorative art, in various forms, and ornamental needlework can be made to pay; but this requires special training and qualifications. Something has been done to punish the advertising rascals who prey on the poor; but they are hard to catch, and harder still to convict.

KATE.—It is often thought that it is easier to find out what with our means it is possible to do than what is really the best thing to be done. Yet the truth is exactly the reverse. The latter is a simple conception, the former a very complex one; the latter only requires a stretch of imagination, the former must take account of a hundred disturbing elements which can be neither fathomed nor foreseen. All you have to look to is that you must do your duty, and do it with all your heart and soul.

M. M. G.—The nation has a life of its own as distinctly defined as the life of the individual. The signs of its growth and the periods of its development make the same declare themselves; and the man or the political party that does not discover them has not learned the character of the nation's life. We cannot enter into political matters, or discuss the points you raise, but we may say once for all that a man, in our opinion, should hold his country first and his party afterwards.

F. G. P.—Brooches, in the shape of a fan, with the edge going straight across the centre, look well, if first painted one colour, and then decorated with a spreading spray of flowers. "Fascinator," or scarfs for winding round the neck or throat, look well in two colours, knitted alternately in Shetland and double Berlin wool, two rows of each, and with the largest pins obtainable. Cast on ninety, and work backwards and forwards in garter stitch till there is about a yard and a half. Finish off one end with a dainty bow of ribbon. This bow is intended to rest on the top of the head when the fascinator is put over.

C. W. V.—Veils should be worn hanging behind, and the face and hands left free. But if the old-fashioned way is preferred, then have them of a size sufficiently large to completely envelop the figure. If not of old lace, they are mostly of tulle, and so made are very becoming. Sometimes they are bordered with lines of silver thread, and covered with small pin-head dots. The plain veils, however, are best, and look well when bordered with lace. A simple wedding gown of satin or silk is greatly improved in appearance if the large tulle veil be showered with small orange flowers and leaves. The typical bridal flowers are now seldom worn in the hair, but appear on the bodice and skirt, the veils being fastened with jewel-headed pins or small brooches of brilliant or pearls. If a wreath is worn it is round and small, and is rarely, if ever, becoming with the present style of hair-dressing, which lends itself well to the fashion of small sprays of jewels, or the introduction of single blossoms among the rouleaux and plaits or soft curls on the crown of the head.

W. R.—Navigators usually add or drop a day from their reckoning at the meridian line, 180° from Greenwich, so that, according to this rule, when the time was 1 P.M. on January 1st, at Greenwich, it was a few minutes of 1 A.M. January 2nd, in those of the Aleutian Islands to the Asiatic side of the 180th meridian, and a few minutes after 1 A.M., January 1st, in those islands to the American side of the same meridian.

The rule, however, is not followed strictly on land; when the United States authorities took possession of Alaska they found that the Russians had carried their way of counting across the day Monday which the inhabitants called the day Monday which we called Sunday. Now that the Aleutian Islands have passed into the hands of the United States, it is probable that even those nearest Asia will count the days of the week as if on the American side of the 180th meridian. At 1 P.M., January 1st, at Carson City, Nevada, according to true local time, and exactly that by standard time; and at Shanghai, China, it was about

9 P.M., January 1st, local time. According to the strict rule of navigation two men might stand in some of the Fiji Islands, or in the extreme point of Asia, within speaking distance, and yet count the day of the week differently, but in practice it is probable that all Asia and the Fiji Islands would reckon the date as if in latitude east of Greenwich.

V. M. M.—There is a good opportunity for you now to break off the match without trouble, and you ought to avail yourself of it.

N. G. B.—The best plan to adopt is to live plainly but well; to take plenty of exercise, and not worry yourself over much about things you cannot help.

LADY B.—Flirtation is always objectionable, and we do not wonder that your own heart was crossed. Had it been the other way you would, perhaps, have been equally irritable.

W. V. S.—The touching of glasses in drinking is a practice well-known, both in England and Germany. It is curious to trace how this custom has prevailed and still exists, even among savage tribes. To drink out of the same cup, and to eat off the same plate, was one of the ways in which the ancients celebrated a marriage, and the wedding feast continues to be not the least important of the marriage ceremonies to the present day.

VAN AWAY.

How far away
My childhood fancies seem to-day!
I thought the sky a veil of blue,
With stars and angels peeping through;
And, when a bright cloud seemed aloft,
I fancied it an angel's boat,
And wished myself amid the crew
Bound for a land beyond my view.
The earth seemed limitless and grand,
With games for every empty hand,
And golden ways we need not miss,
That led to every earthly bliss:
Some of these fancies still I know—
But ah, the years have dulled them so!

How far away
The friends of childhood seem to-day!
The dear home-circle is no more—
They wait me on an unknown shore.
The grave is cold and wide and deep,
And never bridged except in sleep.
In dreams I meet them gay and glad,
Though one dear face is always sad.
My school-friends, now and then, I see:
They live and love, but not for me;
Each buoyed by hopes that glint and shine
In their fond eyes, but not in mine.
Their paths and mine no longer meet,
Each learns her lesson, sad or sweet.

How far away
The years of childhood seem to-day!
Not for the fancies that have flown;
Not for the years that we have known;
It is the thoughts that intervene,
The wants and woes that drift between;
The gales that left our garden bare;
The joys and griefs that none could share—
These make the years of childhood seem,
Sometimes, a half-forgotten dream.

C. B. H.

F. P. P.—We think your friend is much to be admired. A man who never reminds his friends of unworldly facts or tells them unpleasant truths is sure to be liked; and, when a man of such a turn comes to old age, he is almost sure to be treated with respect. It is true indeed that we should not dissimble and flatter in company; but a man may be very agreeable, strictly consistent with truth and sincerity, by a prudent silence where he cannot concur, and a pleasant assent where he can. How and then you meet with a person so exactly formed to please that he will gain upon every one that hears or beholds him; this disposition is not merely the gift of nature, but frequently the effect of much knowledge of the world, and a command over the passions. Frequently that which is called candour is merely malice.

R. V. W.—1. The Rhine and the Rhone, in Europe; the Ganges, in Asia; and the San Joachim River, in America, are all fed in part from glaciers. Other great streams, such as the Indus, doubtless have glaciers among their highest sources. 2. When salt and ice are intimately mixed, the salt seems to combine with the ice somewhat as it does when dissolved in water. The freezing point of salt and water is much below that of pure water, and consequently the mixture melts, either altogether or partly, and in doing so absorbs a great deal of heat, which becomes latent, and which has to be drawn from the surrounding bodies, leaving them intensely cold.

F. M.—Iridium is a metal which is likely to have a much more extensive employment than it now enjoys. Hitherto it has been chiefly used in alloy with osmium for tipping gold pens. But a pen manufacturer has discovered by fusing the metal at a white heat and adding phosphorus perfect fusion could be obtained, with all the hardness in the resulting material of the iridium itself. For mechanical applications this combination is exceedingly useful, as in the case of pen points; and its adaptability is being proved in many ways. Agate, which has hitherto been employed for fine chemical balances, is now giving place to iridium, which takes a finer edge and is not so liable to catch or break. Hypodermic needles for surgical use are now made of gold and tipped with the iridium

compound, which is not subject to corrosion like the old steel points, and it is also being largely applied to instruments for surveyors and engineers and to electrical apparatus. Iridium can be obtained somewhat abundantly from the Russian platinum mines in the Ural, and it is found in combination with gold in California. Some well-known chemists are engaged on experiments with the object of plating vessels with iridium, and as the metal resists the action of acids, it is likely that such vessels will be very useful in many chemical operations.

C. F.—The lines:—
A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye,
Fair as a star, when only one;
Is shining in the sky,
are by Wordsworth.

F. M.—It is not likely that you can do anything which would be effectual in the way of "asserting your rights," as you put it. Your money is gone, and the girl evidently cares nothing for you. Of course, you do not want to force yourself into such a family as you have described by marrying one of the daughters against her inclinations. The best thing for you to do would be to keep away from the whole set hereafter, and go to work to make a fortune by honest endeavour. Should you succeed, you will be pretty apt to know how to take much better care of it than you took of the money which you inherited.

S. M. G.—1. You must tell us what you mean by French decorative art before we can answer your question. Dealers in artists' materials can get you any designs and paints in the markets. 2. Burnside, in our sense, were not in use among the Jews of New Testament times. The Baptist was probably known as John, the son of Zacharias, until his preaching gave him a title of his own. 3. April 24th, 1868, fell upon Tuesday. 4. January 18th, 1870, fell upon Wednesday. 5. Og, King of Bashan, and many more modern monarchs, slept on beds of down. 6. Any family name, not actually absurd, is prettier to our mind than any fancy name.

MARY J.—It is stated that the Irish wake at the present time is returning to what it was originally intended to be, and that is a reverent watching of the dead, and a desire to comfort and cheer the mourners by the presence of their friends. The unseemly orgies which disgraced humanity are nearly a thing of the past, and rarely occur save in the back streets and slums of the large towns. The people are exceedingly particular touching the respect they show to the memory of the dead, so much so, that, strange to say, they will, in some cases, grudge the nourishment and care which might save the lives of the sick, in order to spare money to bury them decently.

HELEN.—You ask us to give you a receipt to accomplish what the most brilliant women have often failed to do; that is, to win the love of the only man they cared for. As a rule, nothing so attracts a man to a woman as the feeling that he is pleased in the slightest degree, or that any other man of equal advantages would be equally agreeable. You should take an interest in all subjects and pursuits which interest the man who attracts you so much, make friends with his friends, especially those of your own sex, and endeavour to command his respect in every way.

M. G. R.—Iceland was settled by the well-to-do northern warriors, who came from a land of song and legend. The Norse settler was a solitary man, or at least he lived in his lonely homestead with no society but that of his household and dependents. "He had time to meditate on the deeds of the national heroes, and of his own ancestors—time to turn some of his intense energy into the form of poems and histories, and to repeat them to others, twice learned them by heart from his change and wanderings, and returned to Iceland—which then, as now, had for her some an irresistible attraction—able to tell a better story and chant a finer poem than before. And so the light was kindled, and spread from homestead to homestead, and a class of men rose up, the poets or skalds, who could repeat the sagas, word for word, for hours together."

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